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WHERE ARE THE CHILDREN?

Over the centuries, historians have told us in detail about the rise and fall of civilizations, the leaders and rulers of our world, dramatic battles and magnificent monuments, but the history of children and childhood has been strangely absent.

The invisibility of children in history and archaeology is sometimes attributed to the scarcity of historical records relating to children, and artifacts that once belonged to them. Perhaps too has been the view that children are somewhat peripheral to the most important historical subjects.

In the last few decades, however, an understanding of childhood through the ages has begun to emerge, and researchers have started to shine a spotlight on this vital aspect of human history.

The archaeological and historical record provides opportunity for the exploration of numerous aspects of childhood – an ancient, ceramic baby bottle, a child-size weapon, tiny fossilized footprints, child ‘doodles’ in medieval manuscripts, nursery rhymes, and mythological tales – they all have stories to tell about the children of our past, and in this issue we examine these records and more, offering a glimpse into what life was really like for children throughout history.

Like children traversing a river by leaping from raised stone to stone, we hop, skip, and jump across fascinating topics.



We speak with Daniel Farkas, the CEO of Drops, a language learning app that strives to preserve Ainu history by harnessing tech to teach their language before it disappears completely. Author Jonathan Perrin uncovers the connections between a heretic Egyptian Pharaoh and the most symbolic color in Judaism. And we examine the ancient origins of New Year’s resolutions, which may have been easier to adhere to in past – when giving up was akin to breaking your vows to a god.

We have found the children; they were there all along, hidden in plain sight. They were the tiny, resilient creators of history, eventually passing it down to us, the children of the future. In that way, it would seem that WE are the ‘heirs of history’, and we must pass it on as humans have done since our time began, striving to create a better world for the little ones that come after us. ■

JOANNA GILLAN

Chief Editor, Ancient Origins Magazine

EXPERTS IN THIS ISSUE...



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Daniel Farkas is the co-founder and CEO of Drops, a language learning company committed to broadening access and awareness of all languages.



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Archaeonews

By Alicia McDermott

Mini Weapons Taught Children Vital Survival Skills

A new study published in *Antiquity* reveals that some weapons found at the Par-Tee site in Oregon, USA were purposely made for little hands to teach children life skills. These weapons were carefully crafted to teach the future adults how to survive.

The Par-Tee site is located on the northern Oregon Coast. Native American Chinookan- and Salish-speaking populations used to call it home. It was excavated in the 1960s and 70s, but the huge number of artifacts recovered from the shell midden site have mostly been forgotten since then. To indicate the immensity of the collection, excavators unearthed over 7,000 tools, as well as burials and hearths, in and around the shell midden.

The researchers have found a variety of sizes of atlatls (ancient dart-throwing weapons) among the artifacts recovered from the site inhabited from 100-800 AD. They believe that the weapons were made to specifically fit the hands of the users. It seems that some of the users were children.

Robert Losey, professor of anthropology at the University of Alberta and lead author in the study published in *Antiquity*, said in a press release, “Basically, they scaled-down their atlatls so they were more easily usable in small hands. This helped children master the use of these weapons.”

And it was no simple task creating the weapons either; Professor Losey explained to *Ancient Origins*:

“Crafting these atlatls was clearly done by highly-skilled people. They would have been very difficult to make—people were carving them from whale bone with stone tools. The atlatls are very symmetrical and lightly built. My guess

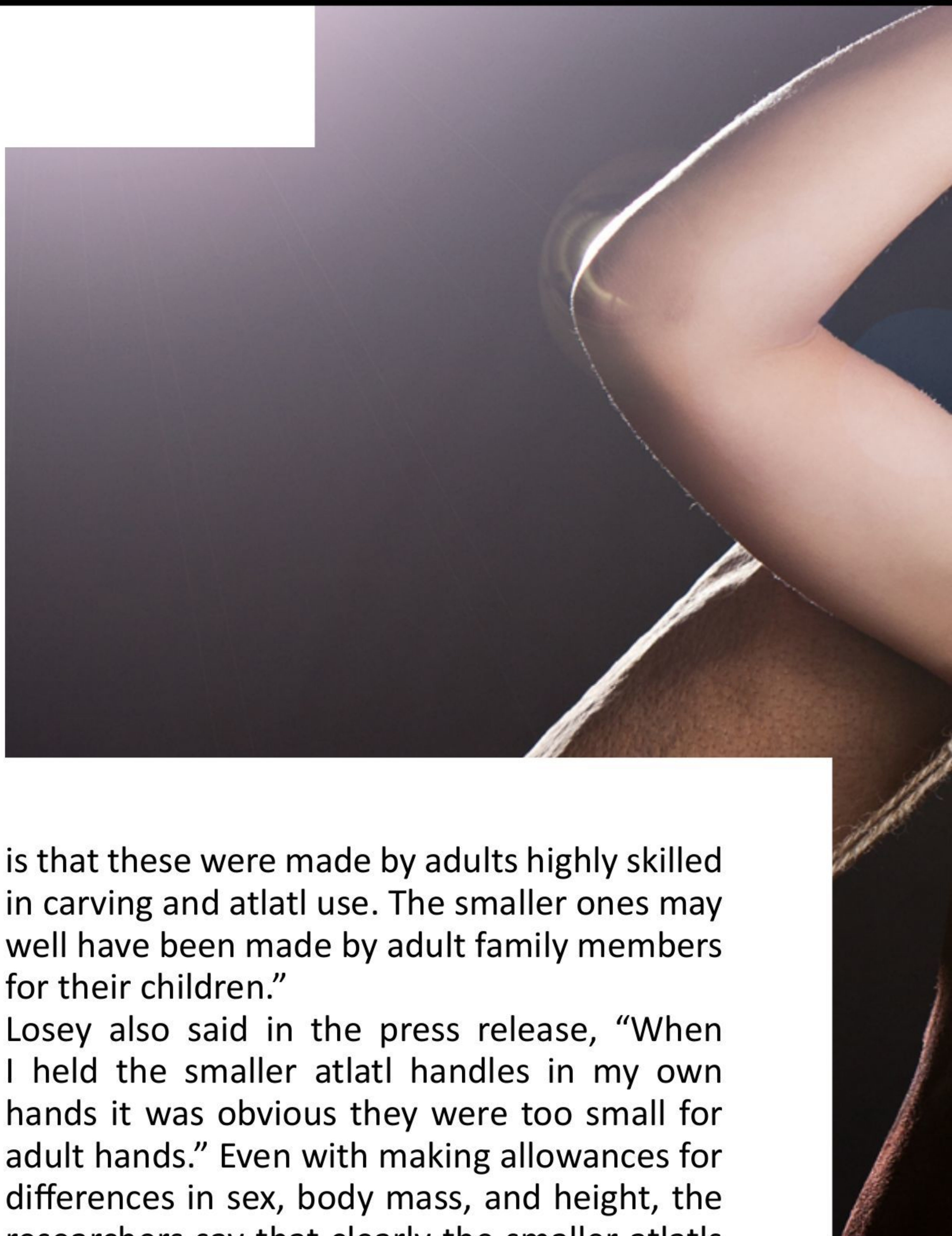
is that these were made by adults highly skilled in carving and atlatl use. The smaller ones may well have been made by adult family members for their children.”

Losey also said in the press release, “When I held the smaller atlatl handles in my own hands it was obvious they were too small for adult hands.” Even with making allowances for differences in sex, body mass, and height, the researchers say that clearly the smaller atlatls they found were made for children.

A KEY TO SURVIVAL

The researchers believe the reason why adults would have gone to such lengths to create special weapons for children was a practical one – kids needed to learn how to hunt. And before they had bows and arrows, the Native Americans of Par-Tee had atlatls. That means that becoming skilled with using the weapons was important for hunting and therefore survival.

As training objects, the small atlatls “provide some of the earliest archaeological evidence of Native American childhood in the region, but also open a window into the way ancient people trained their children in essential life skills,” according to the researchers.





SIGNS OF FORGOTTEN YOUTH

The researchers also remind us that evidence of how a society prepared a child for adult life is not easily noticed or explored in the archaeological record. As Losey said to Ancient Origins: “How people acquire the essential skills they need to live their lives often goes unexamined in archaeology. This project really focuses on how skill with an atlatl was built around 2000 years ago, which involved equipment scaling—reducing down the sizes of things so that children can handle them. This strategy is used today in many sports, but appears to have a very deep history.” This broader view makes the current study even more significant. ■

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ANCIENT ORIGINS
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SAVING

ENDANGERED LANGUAGE GOES MOBILE

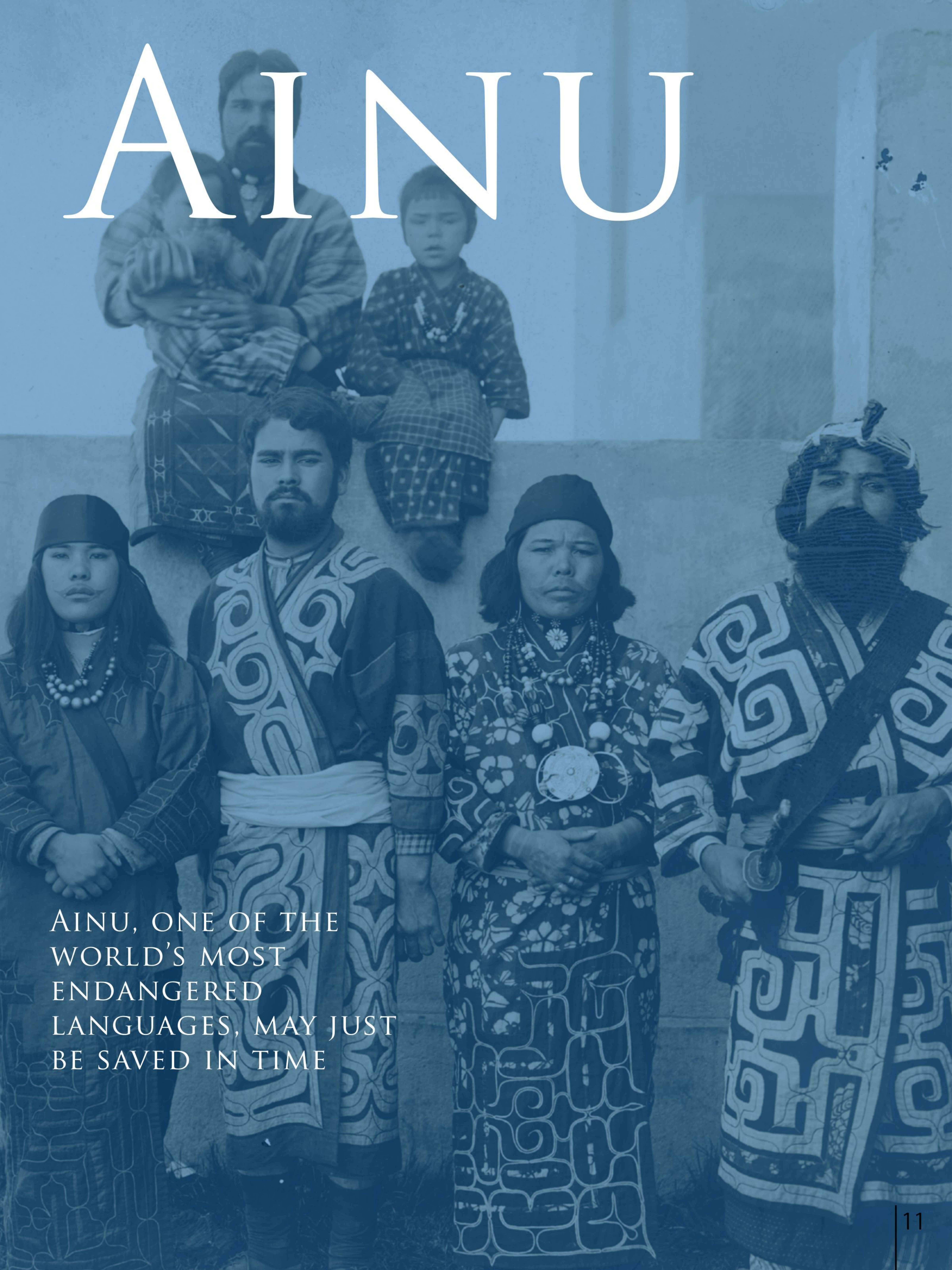
Languages carry a cultural and historical significance that the world cannot afford to lose, yet every two weeks another language goes extinct. In response, the United Nation's Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues recommended that 2019 be the Year of Indigenous Languages, with UNESCO acting as the lead UN agency overseeing the International Year of Indigenous Languages project. On the Japanese island of Hokkaido, the Ainu people are linguistically isolated and comprise less than one percent of Japanese citizens. In May of this year, Japan enacted a new bill to officially recognize the Ainu people of Hokkaido as an indigenous people of Japan, and now with the help of Drops, Ainu, one of the world's most endangered languages, may just be saved in time.

Daniel Farkas is the co-founder and CEO of Drops, a language learning company committed to broadening access and awareness of all languages.

INTERVIEW WITH DANIEL FARKAS
BY DR. MICKI PISTORIUS



AINU

A group of AINU people, including men, women, and children, are posed in traditional clothing. The background is a light blue wall. The people are wearing patterned robes and headbands. The man on the far right has a large beard and is holding a sword. The woman in the center has a large circular ornament on her chest. The child in the background is sitting on a ledge.

AINU, ONE OF THE
WORLD'S MOST
ENDANGERED
LANGUAGES, MAY JUST
BE SAVED IN TIME

Who are the four partners involved in saving the Ainu language and what role does each one play in the process?

Drops' role in the revitalization of Ainu is simply to bring awareness to the local revitalization efforts as well as direct digital access to select Ainu vocabulary. The real praise here goes to the global and local revitalization efforts like 2019 - International Year of Indigenous Languages on the global front and Hokkaido University on the local front. Both IYIL2019 and the broader UNESCO organization have long understood the importance of supporting endangered and indigenous languages. But it is Hokkaido University that has played the most essential role in the preservation of Ainu. In April 2007, the University established the Center for Ainu and Indigenous Studies (CAIS), which continues to be the dominant force in the revitalization of Ainu. In fact, it was the combined efforts of IYIL2019 and CAIS that persuaded us to join forces and add Ainu to Drops. We were fortunate enough to work with Associate CAIS Professor Jirota Kitahara on the translation of the vocabulary that we have included in our Ainu offering and with Mr. Kenyu Yamamaru on Drops' voice recordings of these words.

DROPS

Drops is the new way to learn a language that combines beautiful, engaging word puzzles with mnemonic association. Like an online game, Drops is fast and fun and quickly becomes an integral part of one's daily routine, thus making it easy to learn one or more of Drops' 36 languages. Drops was founded in 2015 by language and learning enthusiasts Daniel Farkas and Mark Szulyovszky. Built off years of research into easier and more effective ways to learn, the app has developed a cult following and is now the fastest-growing language learning app in the world.





Ainu ceremonial dress

Research suggests Ainu culture originated from a merger of the Jōmon (1000 BC) Okhotsk (1000 AD) and Satsumon (1200 AD) cultures. These early hunter-gatherer inhabitants did not speak the Japanese language. Can you tell us about the ancient origins of the Ainu people?

The ancient origins of the Ainu people and their language are contested.

Ainu are indigenous people of Hokkaido, Sakhalin Island and the Kuril Islands in Russia. Until the second part of the 20th century, they were different from their Japanese neighbors in terms of culture and physics.

Today, many Ainu people claim some connection to Japan's prehistoric Jōmon

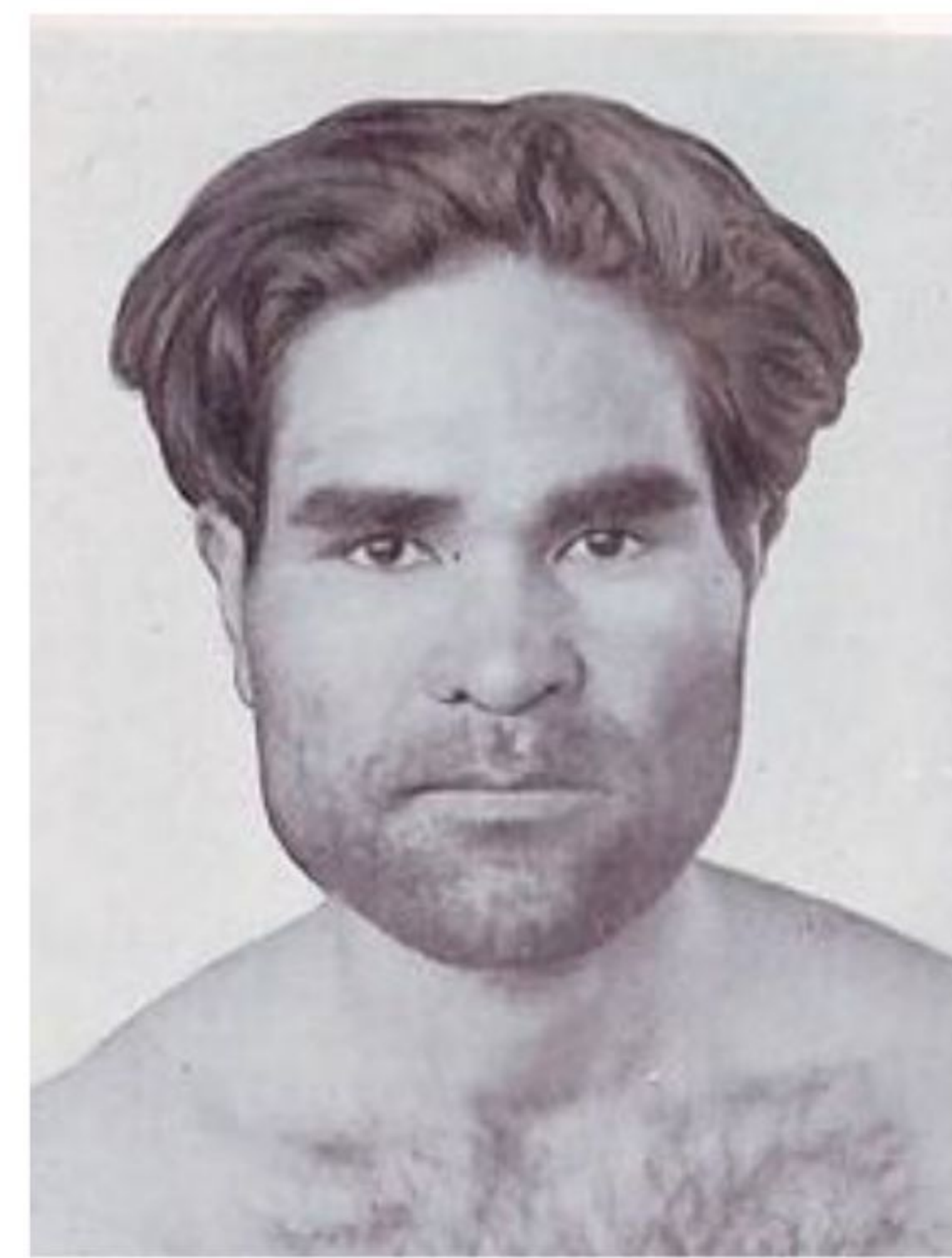
culture, which may originate from northeastern Asia and America. As Satsumon culture from Hokkaido and the northern regions of Honshu also forms the basis of Ainu culture, it might be a merger of these two cultures.

Satsumon culture changed in the mid-12th century through trade. Metal implements from other regions and lacquerware from the Japanese mainland were introduced which allowed the production of wooden and bark utensils. The characteristic of Satsumon culture, which is ceramics and pottery, died out.

When did they learn to speak Japanese and why are they considered a linguistically distinct community?

It came to conflicts when the ethnic Japanese of Wajin, the southern islands, increased their economic influence around Hokkaido. Between the 15th and 18th centuries, a series of wars took place between the Ainu and Japanese. By the 19th century, the Japanese controlled the northern island. They changed the name formally from Ezo to Hokkaido. Then a lot of Japanese migrated to Hokkaido.

In the late 19th century, the Japanese government instituted the Hokkaido Aborigine Protection Act as it wanted to force the Ainu to assimilate. The Ainu were granted small plots of land so that they would farm instead of continuing their tradition of fishing and hunting.



Left to Right: Ainu man, circa 1880

Ainu woman with mouth tattoos and live bear

An Ainu man from Hokkaidō, circa 1910

Furthermore, they were not allowed to speak their language, Ainu, anymore. That is when they had to learn to speak Japanese.

By the early 21st century, the Ainu language and its numerous dialects had been almost completely suppressed by the Japanese. A movement to revitalize the Ainu language did not start until the 1980s.

Today, on the Japanese island of Hokkaido, the Ainu people are linguistically isolated and comprise less than one percent of Japanese citizens. Ainu is one of the world's most endangered languages with multiple dialects.

How many speakers of Ainu are left, and do you think the language can be saved in their lifetime?

According to the *Survey on the Ainu Living Conditions* conducted by the Hokkaido government in 2013, there are about 17,000 Ainu people living in Japan. The survey only includes those who considered themselves Ainu. The Ainu Association of Hokkaido estimates, though, that the number is higher than the one estimated as the survey was not conducted nationwide. I, of course, hope that the language can be saved in their lifetime, but it is very hard for me to say whether that is possible or not.

What hidden evidence of Ainu culture can one still find on the island of Hokkaido?

There are a lot of names of tourist spots in Hokkaido that are Ainu in origin, such as the ski resorts Niseko and Rusutsu or Sapporo, the largest city of the island of Hokkaido.



Ainu traditional ceremony



Woman playing a tonkori, a traditional Ainu music instrument

Another example would include a carved wooden statue called *Irankarapute* that stands in Japan Rail Sapporo Station West Concourse. But there is also the Ainu Museum in Shiraoi or the Akanko Ainu Kotan, a settlement where about 120 people reside.

What distinguishes the Ainu from traditional Japanese culture?

There are some aspects of traditional Ainu culture which are near extinct. One of those aspects was that after puberty, women were tattooed distinctively. They were tattooed around their mouths and wrists. In addition to this, men would not shave after a certain age.

Both women and men used to wear earrings. Ainu people lived in close connection to nature, they were relying on hunting, gathering, and fishing. Also, Ainu people were animists until recently, meaning they believed a spirit or god dwelled within all things.

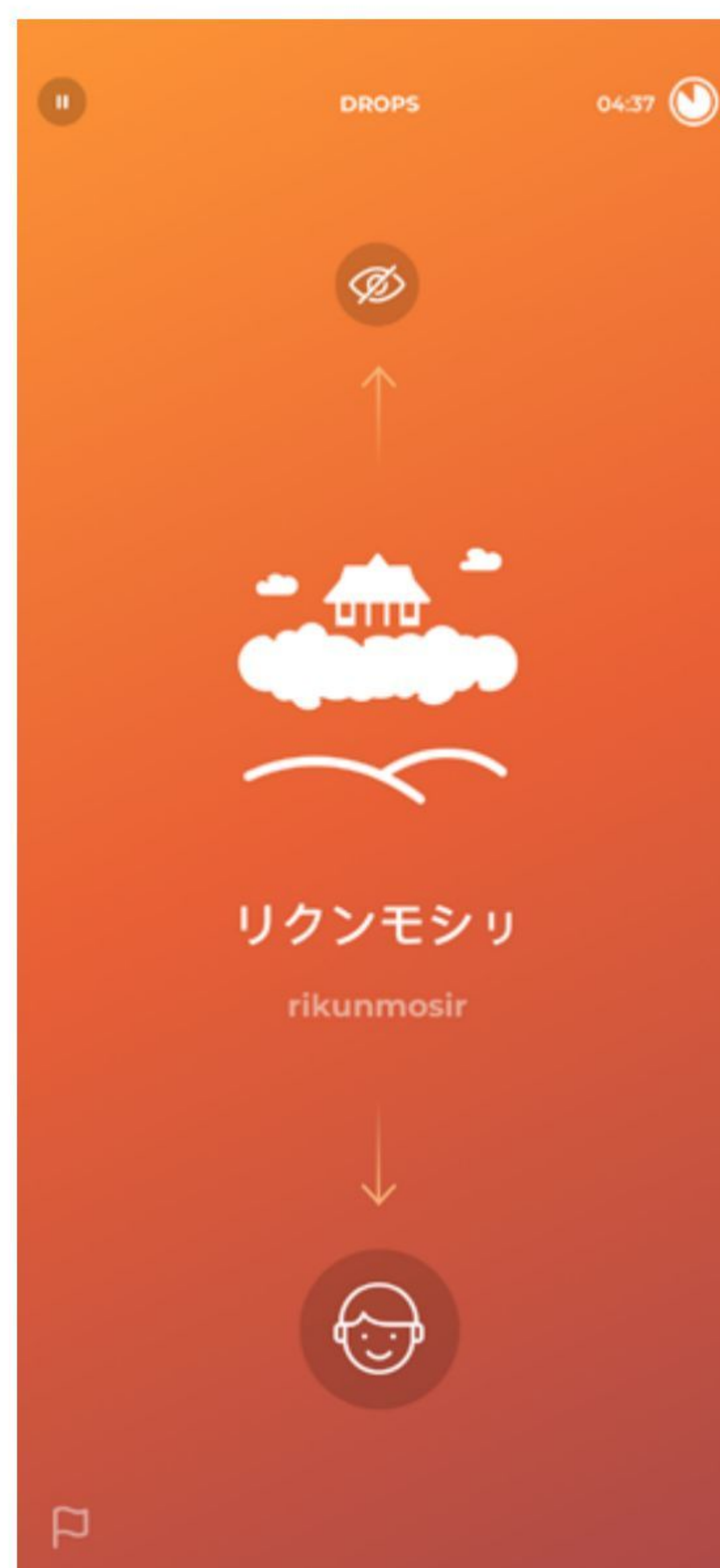
Today, Japanese society has integrated the Ainu lifestyles but people have thought about different ways to recover their culture and tradition.

Can you give us examples of specific Ainu words or phrases that are not found in other languages which would help us to understand the Ainu's social norms and the intricacies of their communication?

Rikunmosir and *yaunmosir* are two Ainu words that are roughly translatable in other languages as 'heaven' and 'earth' respectively. But when we reviewed potential illustrations for these words with our Ainu team, we realized the specific Ainu meanings of these words differ in important ways. For example, a better translation of *rikunmosir* is 'world above', and even more literal is 'house above'. When we originally sent a typical western pearly-gate illustration for *rikunmosir*, the team asked, "Where's the house?" So, we added a house.

Conversely, *yaunmosir* literally means 'world on land'. When we sent an illustration of the planet earth the team again said No and instructed us to create the new illustration instead. You may wonder about the illustrated images' shape. It's the island of Hokkaido, where the majority of the world's Ainu population lives.

JAPANESE SOCIETY HAS INTEGRATED THE AINU LIFESTYLES BUT PEOPLE HAVE THOUGHT ABOUT DIFFERENT WAYS TO RECOVER THEIR CULTURE AND TRADITION



In your opinion why is it important to save a language?

I believe language is art. Not the art of a single individual but an art of a whole culture. Each culture invented something unique that is missing from others and it's preserved by its language. We spend billions of dollars preserving hand-made art: we are building extravagant museums to showcase this type of art. Why don't we care that much about indigenous languages which reveal far more about a culture than a non-linguistic art form can ever capture? We are all fascinated by the cave paintings of Lascaux. Just imagine how cool it would be if we could get access to the language of these ancient people. Indigenous languages are pieces of art. They are our shared past and I believe they should be part of our shared future too.



Ainu genre painting, 1918

What other endangered languages can one learn on Drops?

Drops teaches two other languages that are on UNESCO’s endangered languages list: Hawaiian and Maori. Hawaiian is categorized as critically endangered and Maori as severely endangered. Additionally, Drops teaches Icelandic, which many linguists have classified as a dying language. When Drops launched Hawaiian over a year ago, there were purportedly less than 8,000 Hawaiian speakers left. Since that launch, over 50,000 have started learning Hawaiian with Drops.

Please tell us about the plans and your involvement in the upcoming Upopoy Center to support revitalization and creation of Ainu culture.

Drops is possibly the world’s only digital Ainu learning platform. We plan to support the Upopoy Center’s opening by offering free premium Drops access to all Upopoy Center employees as well as all of the center’s visitors so they can have direct access to the Ainu language. ■

languagedrops.com





Above: Ainu custom, bear hunting

Left: Japanese Ainu group in 1904





Guardians of the Kapu

These statues are the Guardians of Kapu at Pu'uhonua o Hōnaunau in Hawaii. For the ancient people living on the Hawaiian Islands, kapu was a major factor in their day-to-day lives. Kapu was a system of laws that governed political and religious affairs as well as lifestyle choices and gender roles. Anyone caught guilty of breaking kapu was sentenced to death by clubbing, stoning, strangulation, drowning, or burning. The only refuge a kapu rule-breaker could find was at Pu'uhonua o Hōnaunau. Once in the sanctuary, they would be provided with shelter, protection, and forgiveness. After certain rituals, the kapu violator would be welcomed back into the community with no stain on his record. By and large, the kapu system was ended in 1819 by King Kamehameha II.

Kapu Wood Carvings. Georgeburba | AdobeStock



CHARLES CHRISTIAN'S

Ritual Year



And When We Get
Home, We'll Eat It All Hot!

As we slip towards the Holiday Season and Christmas in particular, a period that nowadays starts with Thanksgiving in the United States and runs through until Twelfth Night in Europe (although Christmas is also increasingly celebrated in many primarily non-Christian countries in Asia), the rise of commercialization – or at least pre-packaged food – has meant one date in the festive calendar is no longer celebrated as widely as it once was.

That date is Stir-Up Sunday (technically the last Sunday before Advent) which this year fell on November 24. The name is derived from the wording of a church prayer (in the 1549 Book of Common Prayer) said on that day, which begins with the words: *Stir up, we beseech thee, O Lord, the wills of thy faithful people...*

Its wider significance dates back to at least the 1830s, if not earlier, as this was also the day on which people would begin to prepare their Christmas puddings by mixing together all the ingredients prior to cooking them (traditionally by boiling or steaming) before allowing them to be stored and mature for four weeks until they were reheated for serving on Christmas Day. But, along with the purely culinary activity of stirring up the ingredients, Stir-Up Sunday also became associated with a number of good luck rituals.

One tradition is not just whoever was preparing the pudding would stir it but also every member of the household, including all the children of the family and their servants if they had any (the employment of servants was far more widespread in the

19th century than it is now), would take turns stirring the pudding mixture while making a secret wish.

They might also say this rhyme while they were stirring:

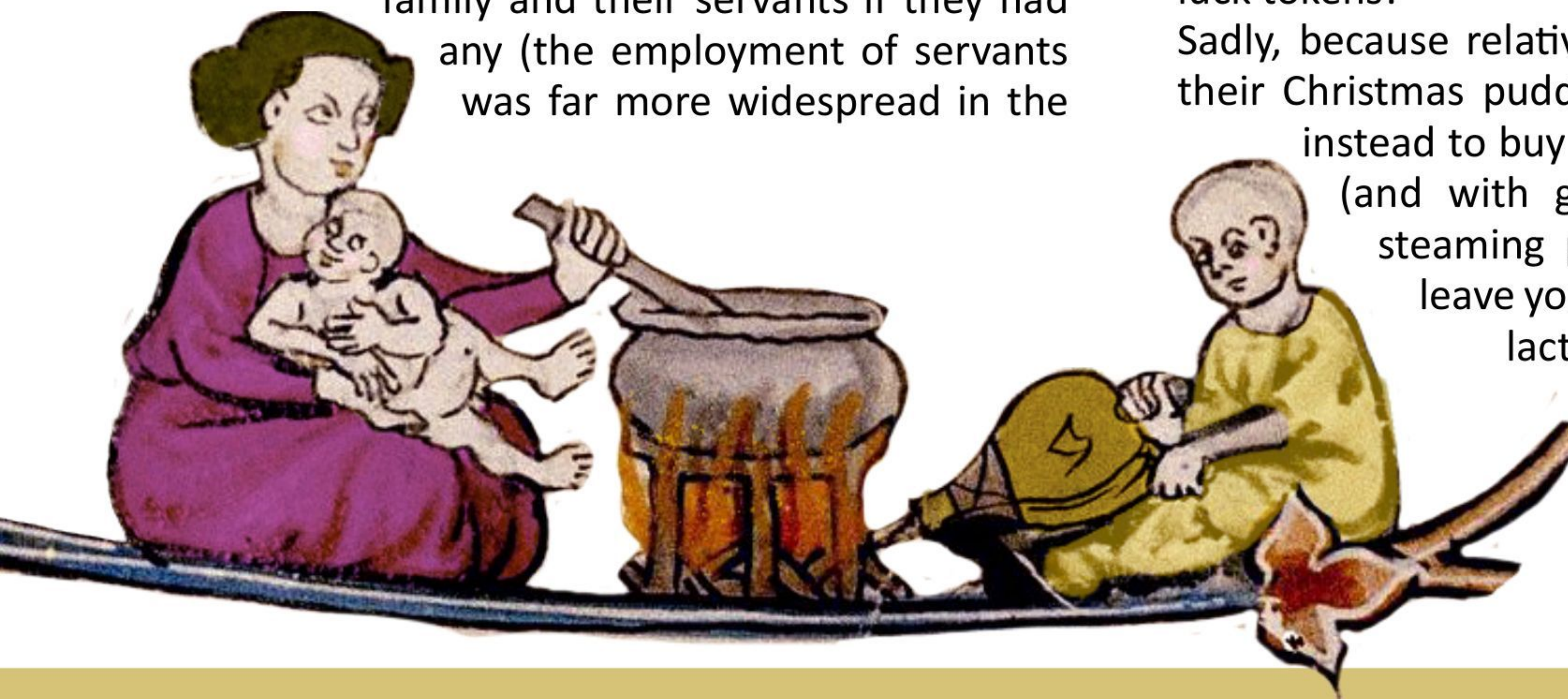
***Stir up we beseech thee,
The pudding in the pot,
And when we get home,
We'll eat it all hot.***



It was also believed Christmas puddings should be prepared with 13 ingredients (including dried fruits and spices) representing Christ and the Twelve Apostles, and that every family member should stir it in turn from east to west (this would be anti-clockwise or widdershins) to honor the Magi and their journey from the East.

Another widely observed custom was to add good luck tokens to the mix, typically this would be a silver coin, or sometimes several coins. In pre-decimalization (1971) Britain it would be a silver thruppenny bit or a sixpence – and indeed many families (mine included) retained some of these coins purely for the purpose of placing them in Christmas puddings. It was said that if you found one of these coins in your portion of pudding on Christmas Day, you were guaranteed good fortune in the coming year. You might also find a silver thimble, for thrift, or even a tiny wishbone, symbolizing luck. These were, of course, far less health and safety-conscious times. Nowadays, we are more aware of the risk of choking or breaking a tooth on one of these hidden good luck tokens!

Sadly, because relatively few people now prepare their Christmas puddings from scratch, preferring instead to buy ready-made ones from shops (and with good reason as the boiling/steaming process takes hours and can leave your kitchen dripping in suet stalactites – or maybe that was just my family) – Stir-Up Sunday and its traditions are fast being forgotten. ■



Charles Christian is a barrister and Reuters correspondent turned writer, award-winning tech journalist, radio presenter, podcaster, blogger, storyteller, and sometime werewolf-hunter who presents a weekly podcast: the Weird Tales Radio Show.

A GAME OF THRONES

THE REMARKABLE LEWIS CHESSMEN

In the early 1800s, an ancient treasure washed up on the Isle of Lewis in westernmost Scotland – 78 ornately-carved chess pieces made from walrus ivory and whale teeth dating back to the 12th century. The Lewis chessmen, as they came to be known, are the most famous chessmen in the world and one of Scotland's most prized treasures. They are also the world's oldest complete chess set – or rather, parts of several sets. While the chessmen have been endlessly studied and displayed, no one really knows who carved them, where they came from, and how they ended up on a beach in Lewis.

The most popular theory about their origin is that they were carved in Norway, as a similar chess piece was found in Trondheim, and the carvings on some of the figures' thrones resemble medieval Norwegian designs. Indeed, 12th century Lewis belonged to the kingdom of Norway and the inhabitants were a mix of Gaelic and Scandinavian.

Nancy Marie Brown, author of *Ivory Vikings: The Mystery of the Most Famous Chessmen in the World and the Woman who Made Them*, describes the precious chess pieces:

"Between one and five-eighths and four inches tall, these chessmen are Norse netsuke, each face individual, each full of

quirks: the king is stout and stoic, the queen is grieving or aghast, the bishop is moon-faced and mild. The knights are doughty, if a bit ludicrous on their cute ponies. The rooks are not castles but warriors, some going berserk, biting their shields in battle frenzy."

While most of the chessmen have been distributed between museums, including The British Museum in London and the National Museum of Scotland in Edinburgh, five Lewis chess

pieces were missing.

Earlier this year, one of five pieces re-emerged. An old family heirloom, it had been purchased in 1964 for £5 (about \$6) and stored since then in a drawer. The family took the chessman to Sotheby's auction house to be assessed but were unaware of its immense significance. In July, Sotheby's put it up for auction and it sold for an incredible sum of £735,000 (\$929,000), the highest price ever paid for a medieval chess piece. ■



Spotlight





HEIRS *of* HISTORY

A Hop, Skip and



Children's Footprints in History

SCIENCE



Ancient Footprints Can Tell Us

What it Was Like to be a Child in Prehistoric Times

Western society has a rather specific view of what a good childhood should be like; protecting, sheltering and legislating to ensure compliance with it. However, perceptions of childhood vary greatly with geography, culture and time. What was it like to be a child in prehistoric times, for example – in the absence of toys, tablets and television?

In our paper, published in *Scientific Reports*, we outlined the discovery of children's footprints in Ethiopia which show how children spent their time 700,000 years ago.

We first came across the question of what footprints can tell us about past childhood experiences a few years back while studying some astonishingly beautiful children's footprints in Namibia, just south of Walvis Bay. In archaeological terms the tracks were young, dating only from around 1,500 years ago. They were made by a small group of children walking across a drying mud surface after a flock of sheep or goats. Some of these tracks were made by children as young as three-years-old in the company of slightly older children and perhaps young adolescents.

The detail in these tracks, preserved beneath the shifting sands of the Namibian Sand Sea, is amazing, and the pattern of footfall – with the occasional skip, hop and jump – shows they were being playful. The site also showed that children were trusted with the family flock of animals from an early age and, one assumes, they learnt from that experience how to function as adults were expected to within that culture.

No Helicopter Parents

The footprints described in our study – from a remarkable site in the Upper Awash Valley of Southern Ethiopia that was excavated by researchers from the Università di Roma "La Sapienza" – reveal a bit more. The children's tracks were probably made by the extinct



species *Homo heidelbergensis* (600,000 to 200,000 years ago), occurring next to adult prints and an abundance of animal tracks congregated around a small, muddy pool. Stone tools and the butchered remains of a hippo were also found at the site, called Melka Kunture.

This assemblage of tracks is capped by an ash flow from a nearby volcano which has been dated to 700,000 years ago. The ash flow was deposited shortly after the tracks were left, although we don't know precisely how soon after. The tracks are not as anatomically distinct as those from Namibia, but they are smaller and may have been made by children as young as one or two, standing in the mud while their parents and older siblings got on with their activities. This included knapping the stone tools

with which they butchered the carcass of the hippo.

The findings create a unique and momentary insight into the world of a child long ago. They clearly were not left at home with a babysitter when the parents were hunting. In the harsh savannah plains of the East African Rift Valley, it was natural to bring your children to such daily tasks, perhaps so they could observe and learn.

This is not surprising, when one considers the wealth of ethnographic evidence from modern, culturally distinct human societies. Babies and children are most often seen as the lowliest members of their social and family groups. They are often expected to contribute to activities that support the mother, and the wider family group, according to their abilities. In many societies, small boys tend



Namibian footprints.
Photos © Matthew Bennett

to help with herding, while young girls are preferred as babysitters. Interestingly, adult tools – like axes, knives, machetes, even guns – are often freely available to children as a way of learning. So, if we picture the scene at Melka Kunture, the children observing the butchery were probably allowed to handle stone tools and practice their skills on discarded pieces of carcass while staying out of the way of the fully-occupied adults. This was their school room, and the curriculum was the acquisition of survival skills. There was little time or space to simply be a child, in the sense that one would recognize today. This was likely the case for a very long time. The Monte Hermoso Human Footprint Site in Argentina (roughly 7,000 years old) contains predominantly small tracks

(of children and women) preserved in coastal sediments and it has been suggested that the children may have played an important role in gathering seafood or coastal resources. Similarly, most of the tracks in the Tuc d'Audoubert Cave in France (15,000 years old) are those of children and the art there is striking. Perhaps they were present when it was carved and painted? However, these observations contrasts to the story that emerged based on tracks from the older *Homo erectus* (1.5m years old) at Ileret, located further south in the Rift Valley, just within the northern border of Kenya. Here the tracks have been interpreted as the product of adult hunting groups moving along a lake shore, rather than a domestic scene such as that at Melka Kunture.

However, these scenes aren't mutually exclusive, and both show the power of footprints to provide a snapshot into past hominin behavior. But it does seem like the overwhelming parenting lesson from the distant past is that children had more responsibilities, less adult supervision and certainly no indulgence from their parents. It is a picture of a childhood very different from our own, at least from the perspective of life in Western society. ■

By Matthew Robert Bennett, Professor of Environmental and Geographical Sciences, Bournemouth University, and Sally Christine Reynolds, Senior Lecturer in Hominin Palaeoecology, Bournemouth University

Originally published on TheConversation.com

Above: Artistic impression of scene at Melka Kunture. Image via Matthew Bennett/ Deriv

The Pitter Patter of Tiny Neanderthal Feet in France

Neanderthal children walked, and perhaps played, along the beach in the prehistoric world. This was confirmed after archaeologists discovered hundreds of footprints made by Neanderthals – most of them children – in Le Rozel, on the coast of northwest France, in Manche, Normandy.

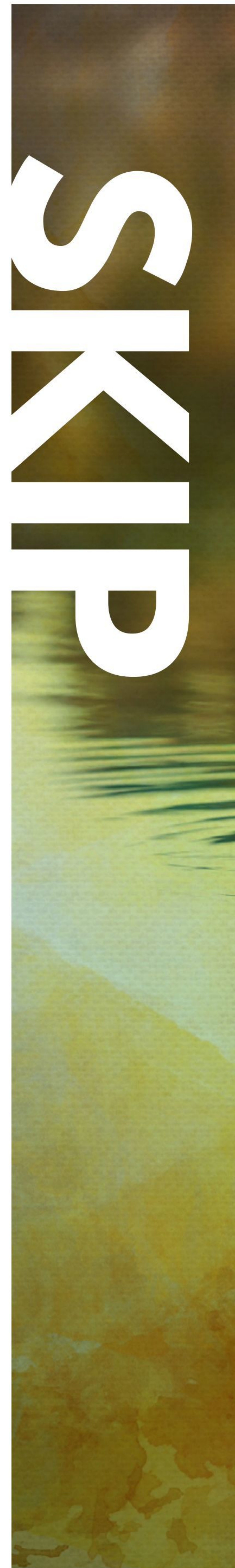
A total of 257 footprints from a group of 13 Neanderthals were found on the beach at Le Rozel. Coastal erosion first exposed Le Rozel in 1967 and the site has been excavated every three months since 2012.

The collection of footprints is the largest group of hominin fossil footprints found to date, and while some of the prints were found in isolated patches, some were found in a walking sequence, with one foot after another.

Previous to Le Rozel, only one set of 62,000-year-old Neanderthal footprints had ever been found, in Romania. Then, in 2018, an array of fossilized footprints was discovered in an ancient sand dune in Gibraltar, on the Iberian Peninsula,

which was thought to have been left by one of the last Neanderthals to walk the Earth.

Of the 257 recorded footprints in Le Rozel, 88 were complete and ranged from four-and-a-half to 11.3 inches in length, indicating the Neanderthals ranged from two feet, five inches tall, to six feet, one inch - children and adults. The measured sizes of the footprints established that more than half of the occupants were shorter than four feet, three inches tall suggesting that between 80 to 90 percent of the individuals were children, with a two-year-old's print measuring only four and a half inches in length. However, caution must be extended to the suggested group size of 13 based on the footprint count for, when left to their own devices, children can be like beach crabs tootling to-and-fro with the tide. In practice, one child leaves many prints for every one left by an adult, but accounting for this and other variables, the team of researchers maintained that children made up most of the group. ■





The Child and the Wolf

26,000-Year-Old Prints Reveal Prehistoric Relationship



Conventional wisdom holds that agrarian man domesticated scavenger canines about 15,000 years ago. However, recent archaeological discoveries and DNA analyses show that not only is the friendship between man and canine closer to 30,000 years old (possibly 40,000 years) but also that man did not master and breed wolves into companionable dogs. Rather, the relationship was built on mutual benefits and respect. This new reality has been made strikingly clear by the discovery of a set of footprints indicating a small child walking alongside a large wolf some 26,000 years ago.

The Chauvet Cave in France is renowned as the site of some of the world's oldest paintings. Over 400 images of animals were created around 32,000 years ago. Yet it is another discovery that gripped the imagination of canine enthusiasts. In the back of the cave, one can see the ancient footsteps of a small child walking alongside a wolf. Stretching over 150 feet, the prints were made in soft clay, hardened, and were left undisturbed for thousands of years.

The human prints are of a barefooted child aged eight to 10 years old and standing about 4.5 feet tall. The child was walking, not running, although at one point it appears that he or she slipped a little in the soft clay. Researchers know that the child carried a torch because there is evidence of him/her stopping at one point to clean the torch, leaving behind a stain of charcoal.

It is amazing to think of a Paleolithic child exploring this ancient cave, examining the paintings and bear skulls that were placed reverently at the back of the cave. Even more amazing is that accompanying (not stalking) the child's footprints are the paw prints of a wolf (or possibly a large dog). This timeless image of a child and dog shatters the notion that dogs were only domesticated 15,000 years ago. More importantly, the new time period radically alters the answer to how dogs became a child's best friend. ■



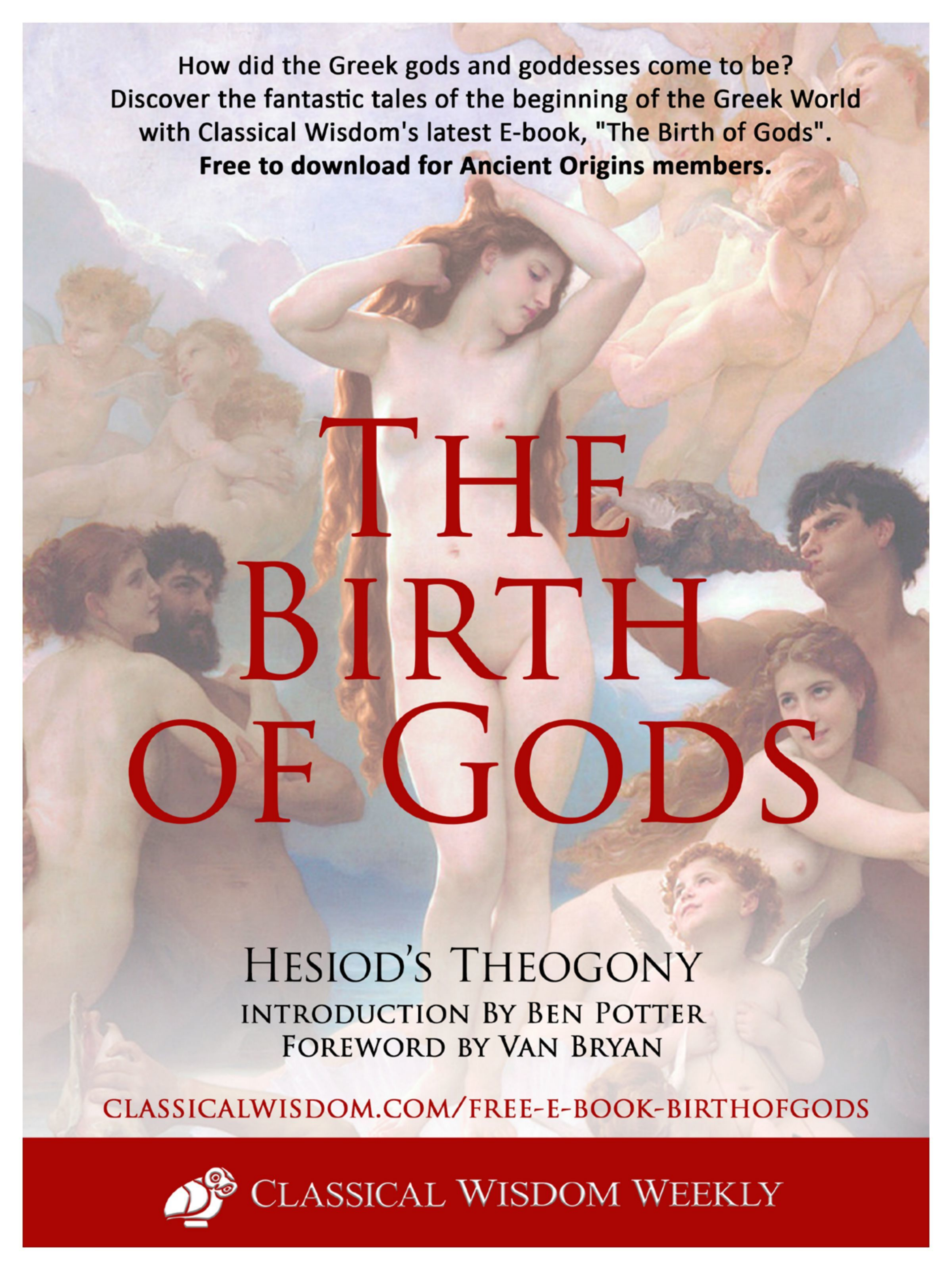
NEANDERTHALS WERE GOOD PARENTS



A team of archaeologists from the Centre for Human Palaeoecology and Evolutionary Origins at the University of York have challenged the traditional perspective that Neanderthal childhood was difficult, short, and dangerous. In a study published in the *Oxford Journal of Archaeology*, the archaeologists argue that Neanderthal children experienced strong emotional attachments with their immediate social group, Neanderthals would care for sick children for years, and children played a key role in society, particularly in symbolic expression. The research team drew upon cultural and social evidence to explore the experience of Neanderthal children. They found, for example, that Neanderthal child burials were more elaborate than those of adults, suggesting strong emotional bonds and the important role that children played in the social group.

One of the most famous Neanderthal child burials was uncovered in 1961 at Roc de Marsal. The grave was in a remarkable state of preservation, considering its age of 70,000 years. It consisted of the body of a child, approximately 3 years of age, who had been deposited in a natural depression in the ground, and apparently placed into the form of an arc, lying on its stomach, with a hand to its head and legs bent at 90 degrees, then covered with soil.

The study authors maintain that the belief that Neanderthal offspring had a harsh childhood comes from biological evidence which also focused on the rugged terrain, climate, and difficult living conditions. However, study lead Dr. Penny Spikins explained that "there is a critical distinction to be made between a harsh childhood and a childhood lived in a harsh environment."



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HESIOD'S THEOGONY
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10

Must-Have Toys for Ancient Tots

BY LIZ LEAFLOOR

Think that today's mad-dash grab for the hottest toys are just a phenomenon of our modern times? Not necessarily. In the past as in the present, where we find children, we find toys, as shown by the fascinating examples of ancient playthings that still charm today. It may surprise you to know that the toy you played with when you were young is likely the same types as those discovered at an ancient dig site. (No, that is not a comment on your age!)

The construction of toys might date back to at least the Pleistocene era, with some archaeologists suggesting hominids were making stone toys from as early

as two million years ago. A study published in the *Oxford Journal of Archaeology* revealed evidence that Neanderthal children played with toy axes and were taught how to make tools, but because it's not always obvious what was or wasn't used as a toy instead of a tool, these ideas continue to be debated.

Depending on the situation, ancient toys ranged from extravagant, intricate, and expensive royal gifts crafted by masters, to the humblest playthings fondly made by a relative with everyday materials at hand.

Our modern life may seem increasingly complicated, but a child's enjoyment of a toy is the simplest thing to understand.

WHAT WAS IN AN ANCIENT GREEK TOY BOX?

Spheria – marbles, made from clay, glass, faience or semi precious stones

Stromvos - a spinning top

Platagi - a rattle, (pig-shapes were especially popular)

Athyrma - a figurine in the shape of an animal, usually a pig or horse

Astragaloi – knucklebones, originally the knucklebones of sheep, which are thrown in the air and caught in various ways

CLATTERING RATTLES

Rattles – the go-to helper to occupy tiny hands and minds. Ancient parents kept babies and toddlers busy with rattles in the same way we do now. Rattles could be fashioned from clay, wood, bronze, dried seed pods or flower heads, and they came in a variety of shapes such as spheres or boxes, and animals were popular—pigs, dogs, owls, and others.

Numerous rattles have been found at archaeological sites; in antiquity, children were typically buried with their toys, with the intention that they would continue to be children and play in the afterlife.



Clay rattle in the shape of a boar, Cypro-Archaic II period (600-480BC). Athens, Greece



**Where we find children,
we find toys**

Inuit doll made of bone and hide brought to
Sweden from the Arctic by polar explorer
Adolf Erik Nordenskiöld, circa 1875

PULL-TOYS

Wheeled toys that you pull along haven't changed over the aeons. What's to reengineer? Little hands are made for gripping and pulling the string. Little eyes see and learn the animal at the end of the tether. The child goes and the animal 'friend' follows along, as they mimic society around them, learning about life. These toys follow a similar pattern through cultures and times. Ancient clay pull-toys have been found dating back to around 2500 BC at Harappa in Pakistan. Later, brass and bronze elephants and horses were common playthings among Indian children from wealthy families. Mexican archaeological sites have recovered many small-wheeled animal artifacts from 1500 BC.



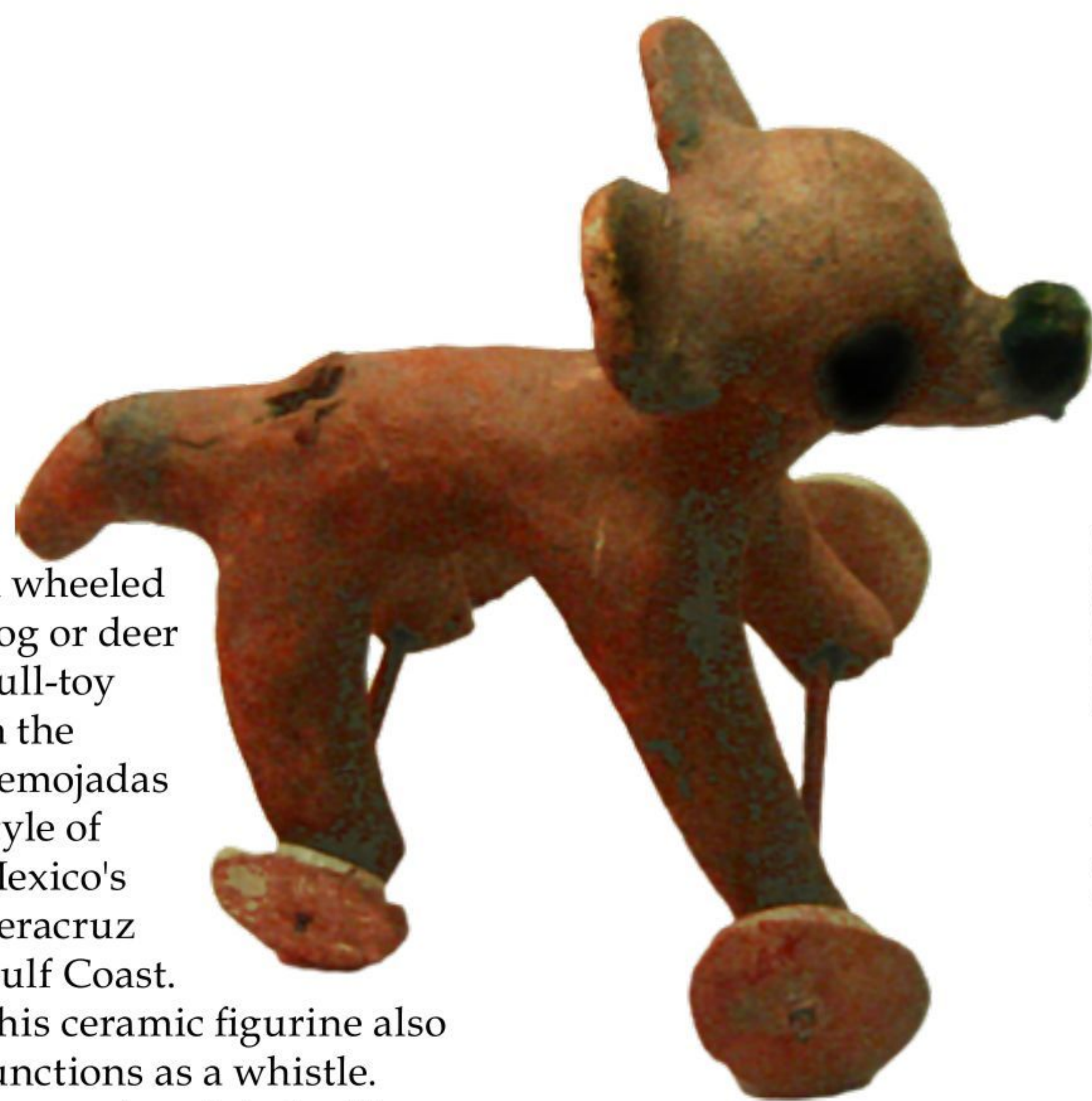
This small "chous," a vessel for wine, would have been given as a gift to a young boy during the Athenian festival known as the Anthesteria, celebrating the new wine. Such vessels depict children at play, often imitating adults. Here, a chubby Eros runs, pulling a child's toy cart behind him.
| The Walters Art Museum



Mesopotamian pull-toy, possibly a ram, made of baked clay. Khafajah (modern Iraq), circa 2900-2330 BC



Toy buffalo on wheels. Terracotta, Magna Graecia, Archaic Age



A wheeled dog or deer pull-toy in the Remojadas style of Mexico's Veracruz Gulf Coast.

This ceramic figurine also functions as a whistle. Its nose is painted with bitumen, a type of crude petroleum. Circa 100 BC to 800 AD

Madman/CC BY 2.5



Children using sticks and strings to whirl their spinning tops in this detail of Pieter Bruegel's *Children's Games*, 1560

SPINNING TOPS

A spinning top is a simple toy, but don't let its modest construction fool you. The top is one of the oldest recognizable toys found at archaeological sites, having originated independently in cultures all over the world. In Iraq, a 6,000-year-old clay top was unearthed, and even the famous pharaoh Tutankhamun of Egypt was entombed with a wooden spinning top dating to 1300 BC. Tops were made of metal,

wood, fruits, seeds, or nuts, and have been found among ancient indigenous tribes across the globe. Some were set in motion with a string or rope coiled around it, so when the string was pulled quickly, it would unwind and spin in place – seeming to defy gravity! Not exclusively toys, tops were used in gambling and prophecy, too.



Ancient Roman wooden spinning top, from Tebtynis (Egypt), dating from the 1st-3rd century AD

RUBBER DUCKS AND OTHER ANIMALS

Animals of all types were represented in the ancient toy lineup. In modern times, we may have played in the bath with a rubber ducky (an invention that was born in the late 19th century first as a chew-toy, as the heavy vulcanized rubber it was made of was too heavy to float). But animal toys were often made of clay, wood, bone, teeth, horn, or anything commonly at hand. They sparked the imaginations of children, and played an educational role, identifying various animals and their roles or uses in society from an early age.



Left: Cute Japanese duck made of whale tooth, dating from the 18th - 19th centuries



Above: Tiny cast copper alloy cat - or maybe a horse. Medieval Shropshire, UK

The Portable Antiquities Scheme/
The Trustees of the British Museum

TINY BOATS WERE A BIG DEAL

You might have had a little toy boat to sail the seas of imagination as a child. So too did ancient children. The most well-preserved types of toy boat models available to archaeologists are Egyptian. These tiny boats were made from ivory, wood or clay. True 'toy' boats are rare though, as Egyptian ship models we now find weren't toys, but grave goods in tombs of prominent people as magical replacements of the boats used to ferry souls into the afterlife.

Children's toy boats are sometimes found at sites of maritime cultures; A small, wooden, 1,000-year-old carved 'Viking ship' was found on an ancient farmstead on the coast of central Norway. The toy on the farm showed that kids didn't just work hard but were encouraged to play as well.



Egyptian ship model of wood and painted clay, circa 2000 BC

ON A ROLL WITH HOOPS

Playground antics still involve hoops. The large hoop is rolled along the ground, often nudged and balanced by a hand or stick. The name of the game is to keep the hoop upright, or to show your skill with various tricks (perhaps twirling it around your middle with no hands, like the modern 'Hula Hoop'). But this is a very ancient tradition among aboriginal peoples in many parts of the world. It is ubiquitous throughout Africa, and the Americas. The symbolical nature

of the toy plays a big role across cultures.

The Greeks called the hoop *Trochus*. Hoop rolling was practiced in the gymnasium, and the hoop was also used for tumbling and dance. It was a popular pastime, but not counted as a 'real' sport. Romans made their hoops out of bronze, iron, or copper, and the hoop needed to stand up to the level of the player's chest. A bronze hoop was one of the toys of the infant Dionysus.



Hoops have been a children's toy for thousands of years. Canadian boys rolling bicycle rim hoops in Toronto, 1922

MARBLES AND JACKS



Did you play marbles like the ancients? In antiquity, they were made from clay, glass, faience, semi-precious stones, or even nuts! Stone marbles have been found at excavations near Mohenjo-Daro in Pakistan – one of the world's earliest major cities, dating back to 2500 BC. Marbles have rolled up at Chaldean, Mesopotamian, and Egyptian dig sites, and made their way to Europe in the Middle Ages. Knucklebones (or Jacks) is an ancient game frequently depicted in painting and sculpture. It was usually played with five or 10 small objects, but was played in many different ways. Tiny bones of a sheep were thrown up and caught on the back of the hand or landed on a surface to be tallied up. Called *astragalo* in Greek, this, too, was a game that was involved in divination; young women who played were playing with fate to find a good husband. Men played with these as you would at dice games.



Top: Fired pipe-clay marble, 1850-1900 AD
| North Lincolnshire Museum

Above: Roman children playing a game with nuts, from a child sarcophagus circa 270-300 AD

Right: Mongolian pastern bones of an animal, for games like knucklebones or jacks



Sarah Joy/CC BY SA 2.0



Game of Marbles, Karl Witkowski, 19th century



John Morgan/CC BY SA 2.0



Dolls Left to Right: Ancient Egyptian wooden paddle doll, 2030-1802 BC

Traditional native American corn husk doll

Akua'ba fertility doll of the Ashanti people, from Ghana, West Africa

DOLLS WERE WITH US THROUGH IT ALL



Textile doll made of cotton, wood and wool, from the Chancay culture of Peru, 1000-1450 AD

Not many artifacts are as recognizable to humanity as a child's doll. These little simulacrum have made their way (or have been carried under the arm of a child) throughout human history and are considered one of the oldest children's toys in existence. Not only playthings, they were used in magical and religious rituals around the world; the earliest documented dolls going back to ancient Egypt, Greece, and Rome. They were homemade, rudimentary playthings or elaborate art pieces made of almost anything - clay, stone, wood, bone, ivory, leather, plants, or wax. Dolls with movable limbs and removable clothing date (with cutting-edge fashion of the times) back to 200 BC. In Greece and Rome, it was customary for boys to dedicate their toys to the gods when they reached puberty and for girls to dedicate their toys to the goddesses when they married.

NOISE! NOISE! NOISE!

Even in the ancient world, children liked to make noise. It's no surprise that their toys made sounds as well. But somehow in the hands of a child the smallest toys make the loudest noises. Some of these were just miniature versions of common musical instruments, like clappers, rattle drums, or whistles. Chinese children played with whistles, bamboo and reed pipes, and colorful rattles. Ancient Mesopotamian children would harden clay discs and tie them with rope, then whirl them around above their heads, creating a loud buzzing sound. Similar toys are known as bullroarers in other parts of the world, and though it's now mainly associated with the Aboriginal peoples of Australia, it originates in the Paleolithic period, dating back to 18,000 BC in Ukraine!



Above: This traditional pellet drum instrument comes from Africa



Right: Prehistoric instruments from France. The bullroarer far right is made with reindeer antler

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Silly Old Bear

Stuffed toys, as we now know them, are a German invention of the 19th century and the teddy bear is likely the most famous of them all. The Steiff Company in 1880 repurposed furniture upholstery machinery to crafting stuffed toys. These were different than ancient ragdolls, as they had a stiffer, 'plush,' fur-like fabric. In 1903, Richard Steiff designed the familiar stuffed bear, and at the same time in the US, Morris Michtom created the first teddy bear after being inspired by a drawing of President "Teddy" Roosevelt with a bear cub.



TOY SOLDIERS

This medieval European bronze mounted knight is one of the earliest extant toy soldiers. He would have held a jousting lance, possibly made of wood, in his right hand, which has since been replaced. Many such toys were undoubtedly made—they were easy to produce, not requiring precision in their modeling to make them ‘effective’, but few survive today. Most were lost or broken through long use. The workmanship is crude, but for any little boy with his head full of dreams of becoming a knight, it was enough. ■







Nuremberg Christmas Market

During the Middle Ages, December markets were held in town squares across Europe. In the Holy Roman Empire, these markets soon turned into Christmas markets, the Striezelmarkt in Dresden being the first in 1434 AD. The Nuremberg Christmas Market (1530) hosts a special Children's Christmas Market on Hans-Sachs-Platz, featuring the Christkind. In the Middle Ages, the Catholic tradition saw children receiving gifts on December 6, St Nicolas Day. Martin Luther deplored the veneration of saints and introduced the practice of giving gifts to children on Christmas Eve, brought to them by the 'Christ Child'. This transformed into the Angel of the Annunciation, or Christmas Angel over time and so in Nuremberg, a tall maiden between 16 to 19 years is chosen to be the Christkind. Millions of people visit the Christmas markets annually to select Christmas decorations and traditional toys.

Ceramic house miniature
Олександр Луценко |
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NURSERY RHYMES

WITH UNEXPECTED AND DISTURBING HISTORICAL ORIGINS

Many people associate nursery rhymes with reading happy stories to children, or remember being children themselves and chanting them while they play. However, the popular explanations for the origins of several English nursery rhymes show that they may be more complex, and at times more disturbing, than they first appear.

There is controversy regarding exact dates when they were created and the message behind some of these rhymes. Nonetheless, most researchers agree that often the rhymes were meant to provide morals and values, or warnings, to their audience.

Some researchers have also suggested that these seemingly nonsensical rhymes were not really meant for children at all—nor are they nonsense. Instead, the rhymes were steeped with political and satirical messages, created in such a way to confuse the authorities listening; thus, preventing legal or other repercussions.

BY ALICIA MCDERMOTT



THE RHYMES WERE MEANT TO
PROVIDE MORALS AND VALUES...
OR WARNINGS

BAA BAA BLACK SHEEP: FEUDAL TAXES

*Baa baa black sheep, have you any wool?
Yes sir, yes sir, three bags full!
One for the master, one for the dame
But none for the little boy who cries down the lane.*
(Final line until the late 16th century)

-OR-

And one for the little boy who lives down the lane.
(Change to be more suitable for children.)

Baa Baa Black Sheep was first published in 1744. However, most scholars claim that this rhyme is based on the reality of life in feudal times in England in general and the export tax for wool farmers of 1275 created by King Edward I (the master) in particular. The "bags of wool" (or produce from the farmers) first went to the nobles, then the church, and in the end, practically nothing was left for the poor "little boy" (farmers).



MARY MARY QUITE CONTRARY: A CRUEL OR TRAGIC QUEEN

*Mary Mary quite contrary,
How does your garden grow?
With silver bells and cockle shells
And pretty maids all in a row*

According to some researchers *Mary Mary*, also published in 1744, refers to "Bloody Mary", Mary Tudor or Mary Stewart - Queen of Scots. Mary Tudor was a strict Catholic and during her reign from 1553-1558 her garden (a graveyard) grew, as many protestants were executed for not converting to Catholicism. "Silver bells" and "cockle shells" may have been the nicknames of torture devices (thumbscrews and instruments attached to the genitals). The "maids" (shortened from maiden) in the rhyme is thought to be another nickname for another torture device or the guillotine.



If Mary Queen of Scots is the Mary referred to, then the "silver bells" and "cockle shells" are said to be a mention to ornaments she received on a dress from her first husband, the Dauphin Francis II of France. In this interpretation, the "pretty maids" are Mary Stewart's ladies in waiting.

GOOSEY, GOOSEY, GANDER: RELIGIOUS PERSECUTION OR AN OBLIGATION TO PRAY

*Goosey, goosey, gander,
Whither dost thou wander?
Upstairs and downstairs
And in my lady's chamber.
There I met an old man
Who wouldn't say his prayers;
I took him by the left leg,
And threw him down the stairs*

First published in 1784, *Goosey, Goosey, Gander* also refers to Catholic persecution in the 16th century. At the time, "priest holes" became popular as Catholics set up small hidden rooms in their homes to pray. If zealous Protestants found the Catholic praying in Latin, the whole family would be executed. The "left leg" in the rhyme is claimed to be the nickname for Catholics at the time, who were known as "left-leggers."

Another interpretation suggests that this rhyme may simply be a warning by its creator for listeners/readers to pray or they will receive unfortunate consequences.



Fresco in Bayeux Cathedral

HUMPTY DUMPTY: JUST A BAD EGG?

*Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall,
Humpty Dumpty had a great fall.
All the King's horses, And all the
King's men
Couldn't put Humpty together
again!*

-OR-

*Threescore men and threescore
more,
Could not place Humpty as he was
before.*

Humpty Dumpty (published in 1799) also has two possible meanings. A "Humpty Dumpty" is claimed to be a nickname used in the 15th century for an overweight person.

The second explanation for the rhyme states that Humpty was the nickname of a cannon used by the army of King Charles I to capture Colchester in the English Civil War. The show reportedly "sat on a wall" of a church until it "had a great fall" as it was knocked down by opposing cannon fire. "Humpty" the cannon could not be repaired despite the efforts of "all the King's men."

It must also be noted that this rhyme and others have counterparts in other European cultures.



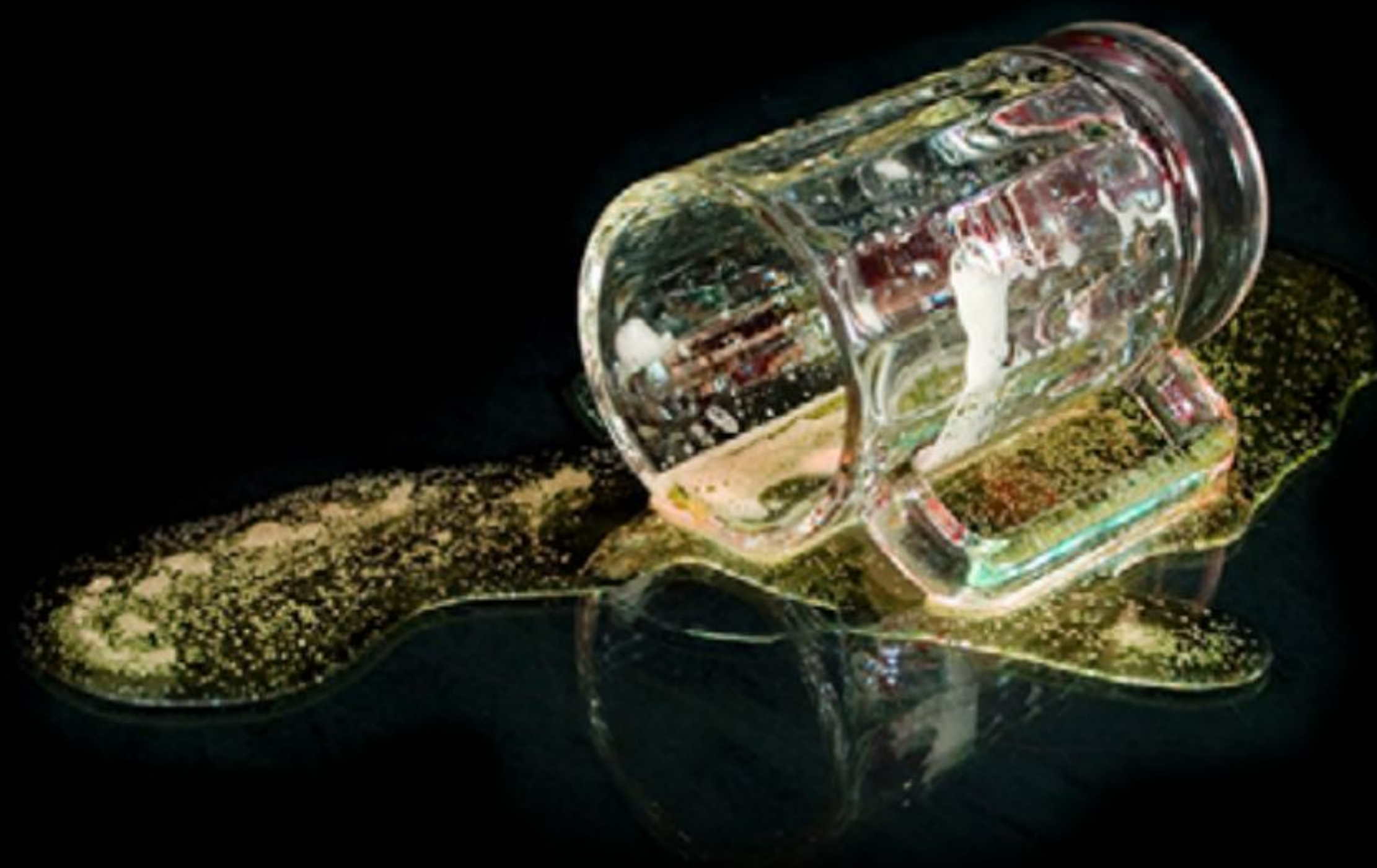
JACK AND JILL: LIQUID MEASURES AND BEHEADED ROYALTY



*Jack and Jill went up the hill,
To fetch a pail of water.
Jack fell down,
And broke his crown;
And Jill came tumbling after.*

Scholars have provided two main beliefs regarding the origins of *Jack and Jill*, which was first published in 1765. The more devious version of the rhyme refers to the beheading of France's Louis XVI (Jack) and Marie Antoinette (Jill), with the French royalty gaining status "up the hill" first and later their execution as Jack breaks his crown and Jill tumbles after. This meaning has been cast off by many however as the date of the rhyme is before their executions.

The more favored interpretation is that this rhyme, like *Baa Baa Black Sheep*, is a response to the reform of taxes on liquids put into place by King Charles I. It is said that "Jack" was the nickname for a half-pint (1 cup) and "Jill" was a quarter-pint (1/2 cup).



SING A SONG OF SIXPENCE: SCARE THE KING OR JOIN THE PIRATES

*Sing a song of sixpence a pocket full of rye,
Four and twenty blackbirds baked in a pie.
When the pie was opened the birds began to sing,
Oh wasn't that a dainty dish to set before the king?
The king was in his counting house counting out his money,
The queen was in the parlor eating bread and honey
The maid was in the garden hanging out the clothes,
When down came a blackbird and pecked off her nose!*

The most popular explanation for *Sing a Song of Sixpence* is that blackbirds (or any birds) were actually baked into pies for kings/nobles in the 16th century as a surprise and joke from the cook/a jester. This act has been documented and some cookbooks from the time included recipes on how to complete the task. Another origin, which was first put in print in 1744, is that it was a code used by pirates in the early 1700s to find new recruits. It was supposedly popular for those enlisting for the famous pirate Blackbeard in particular.

Blackbeard is said to have paid his crew members "sixpence" a day (an uncommon practice for pirates of his time) and the crew members "four and twenty" of Blackbeard "blackbird" were hidden in the ship "pie." The pirates' goal was to get the treasure "tasty dish" for Blackbeard "the king." The king "counting out his money" showed that Blackbeard had the money to pay the new recruits well. The "Queen", (the Queen's Revenge - Blackbeard's ship) was taking on supplies in dock "eating bread and honey" thus it was time to join on. The last two lines are explained as maritime references.



Ring O' Roses,
Thomas Webster, circa 1850

RING AROUND THE ROSIE: A MISUNDERSTANDING?

*Ring a Ring O' Roses,
A pocketful of posies,
Atishoo! Atishoo!
We all fall down!*

Many people believe they know the origins of *Ring a Ring o' Roses*: The Black Death (1348) or the Great Plague (1665) (thus the chanting of "a tishoo" and "we all fall down" [dead]). With the symptoms of the plague presenting themselves as a red ring (ring o' roses) and posies

supposedly providing protection (in the common belief at the time of the Great Plague), this connection is understandable. Furthermore, another modern version of the rhyme has been altered to use the word "ashes" in place of "atishoo," supporting the hypothesis with the idea of burning the corpses of plague victims.

Nonetheless, this association is modern according to scholars, who now doubt the relationship

between either of the events and the rhyme. Their reasoning is that the first known documenting of the rhyme is 1881, much later than either plague. The question many researchers have asked is: why did it take so long to write it down if it was so popular?



That question may be asked about many of these rhymes. Were they just passed on orally at first as a further form of protection, as messages were hidden in the "nonsensical" rhymes? There is still debate on this topic.

To reiterate, the ideas presented here are just some of the more agreed-upon interpretations of the origins and messages behind these nursery rhymes. As time passes and verses change to appeal to younger audiences, the beliefs on the origins and meanings will undoubtedly change as well. As culture is created and changes over time, so too has society created these interpretations. ■

WERE THEY PASSED ON ORALLY AS A FORM OF PROTECTION, WITH MESSAGES HIDDEN IN THE "NONSENSICAL" RHYMES?

Drawing in the Past

Medieval Children Doodled in a Manuscript

BY NATALIA KLIMZCAK

Children of the Middle Ages were not too different from the children of today – they enjoyed playing and learning and expressing their imagination through drawings and scribbles. This is highlighted in a remarkable 14th-century book from a Franciscan convent in Naples, which contains child ‘doodles’ in the margins.

The medieval manuscript covers such topics as astronomy, biblical dates, tables for determining any day of the week between 1204 and 1512, religious sermons, and astrology. But the drawings are the work of mischievous little kids - very similar to what children do nowadays.

The drawings were discovered by chance while researching an unrelated project. Deborah Thorpe, an expert on medieval manuscripts from the University of York in Canada, believes they depict a human, cow or horse, and some kind of demon or devil.

When discussing the find she said, “I was looking through a database of medieval manuscripts online and I found images of these beautiful doodles in the margins and to me, they looked like they were done by children. I thought ‘this is really interesting, has anyone written anything about this?’”

Thorpe recruited several child psychologists to help analyze the doodles. They came up with a set of criteria which helped them to classify the sketches and determine the approximate age of the drawer. They checked the elongated shapes, the really long legs, the lack of a torso, and the focus on the head. There are similarities between the drawings that children make at specific ages and the researchers concluded the drawings likely came from children between the ages of four and six years old.

There are later examples of historical children’s drawings, but Thorpe believes

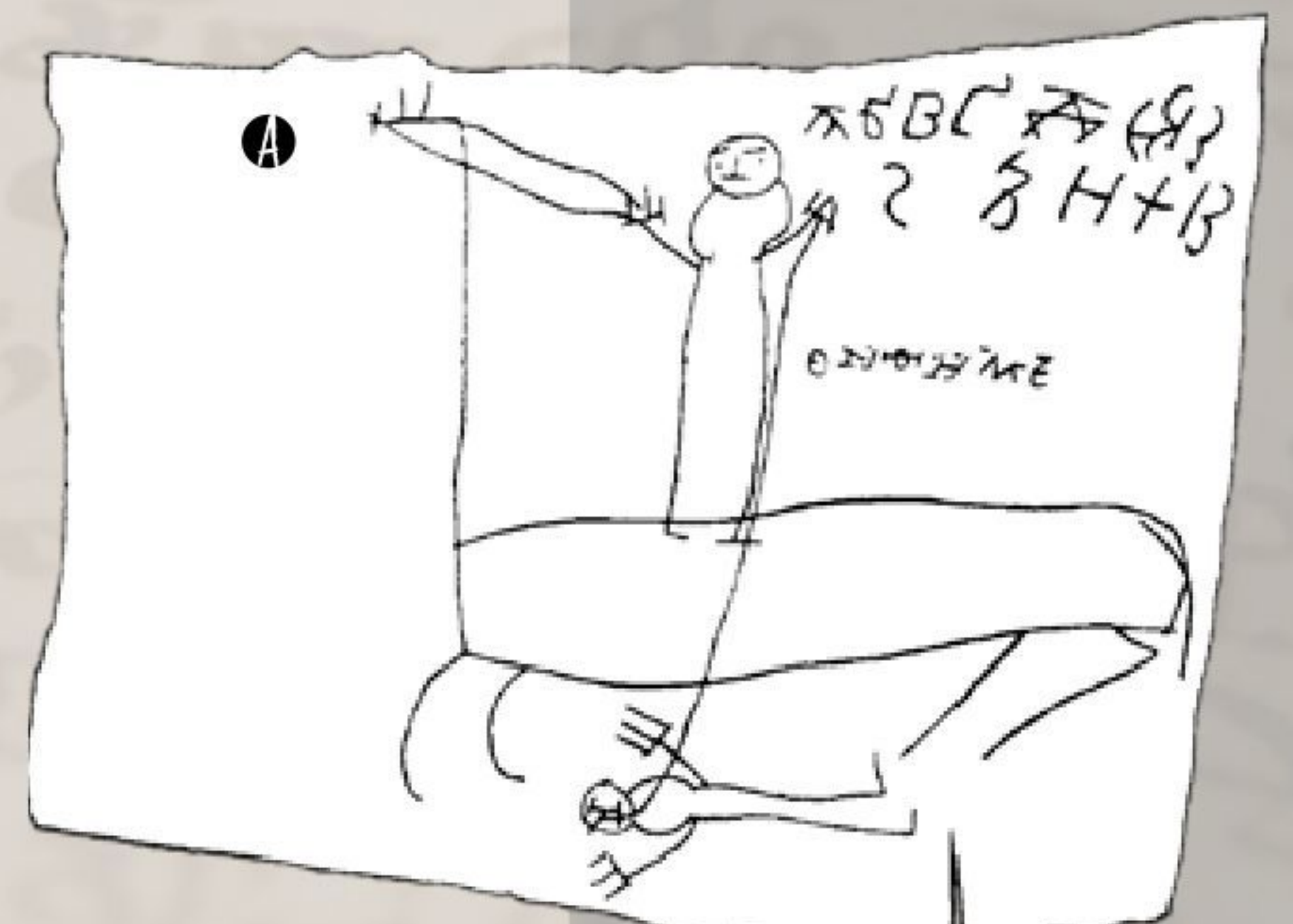


A child's drawings in medieval manuscript with a human and cow or horse

Credit: LJS 361, Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books and Manuscripts, University of Pennsylvania Libraries folio 26r.

that this is the first time that drawings in medieval books have been classified as the work of children with the use of a set of psychological criteria.

Thorpe’s discovery, although impressive, is not the only child’s drawing that has been found from the past. In June 2014, a child’s drawings were unearthed on ancient birch-bark texts in the historical city of Veliky Novgorod in north-western Russia. The document contains spelling lessons and drawings made by a boy named Onfim, who is estimated to have been between six and seven years old at the time. His drawings were made in the mid-13th century. ■



Ⓐ Horseman, with name "Onfim" to the rider's right, and above that the alphabet, A – K

Ⓑ Onfim's doodles from the 13th century

Ⓒ Onfim's spelling lessons and doodles on birchbark

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THE SCOURGE OF CHILD LABOR IS AN ANCIENT CURSE

BY ASHLEY COWIE

Archaeological trends go through waves that are often inspired by the ripples of current social concerns. With many activists raising awareness of women's and children's rights, it is almost no surprise that the archaeological community has seen rising interest in the role of children and child labor in prehistoric societies. At the European Association of Archaeologists (EAA) conference in Barcelona, Spain, archaeologist Povilas Blaževičius of the National Museum of the Palace of the Grand Dukes of Lithuania in Vilnius disclosed shocking evidence that in the distant past, young children were salt mining, bricklaying, and making clay vessels. He found small fingerprints from eight to 13-year-old children on more than 10 percent of the bricks and tiles of a

medieval Lithuanian castle. "When we have fingerprints of a child inside a pot, we definitely know that a child formed it... For me as an archaeologist, it's another way to find children in past societies," commented Blaževičius.

The in-depth study of children in history was somewhat neglected until the 1990s when archaeologists began examining the roles of women and children in society. Archaeologist Mélie Le Roy from the Mediterranean Laboratory of Prehistory-UMR 7269 in Europe and Africa in Aix-en-Provence, France, was one of the session organizers for the project and told journalists the team expects that they "will find more and more evidence that children were participating early in their lives in economic society."



Le Roy found three human baby teeth from two children who were younger than 10 at the time of death sometime between 2100 and 3500 BC. The teeth were marked with grooves usually formed by repeatedly using them as tools for holding plant or animal materials while softening them. The material was probably used for sewing or making baskets.

Hans Reschreiter, an archaeologist at the Natural History Museum of Vienna was also involved in the study and

explained that “researchers excavating the ancient salt mines of Hallstatt, Austria, discovered a child-sized leather cap dated to 1000–1300 BC, along with very small mining picks.” This suggests children were “working in these mines at least two centuries earlier than scientists had thought.”

In Amarna, Egypt, archaeologists discovered desert graves belonging to ordinary Egyptians who lived and worked in the city of Pharaoh Akhenaten. A total of 105

individual skeletons excavated at the North Tombs Cemetery in 2015, was studied by Dr. Gretchen Dabbs of Southern Illinois University, who found that 90 percent of the skeletons had an estimated age of between seven to 25 years, with the majority of these estimated to be younger than 15 years. “Essentially, this is a burial place for adolescents,” she commented.

RESEARCHERS EXCAVATING THE ANCIENT SALT MINES DISCOVERED A CHILD-SIZED LEATHER CAP ALONG WITH VERY SMALL MINING PICKS

Opposite left to right;
Child labor at Avondale
Mills in Birmingham,
Alabama, 1910

Little girls working in
Brick Kilns of Nepal,
2014

Renactment of a
prehistoric child working

Leather shoe from the
Hallstatt culture, 800-400
BC



Opodeldok/CC BY 2.5



Shresthakedar/CC BY SA 4.0



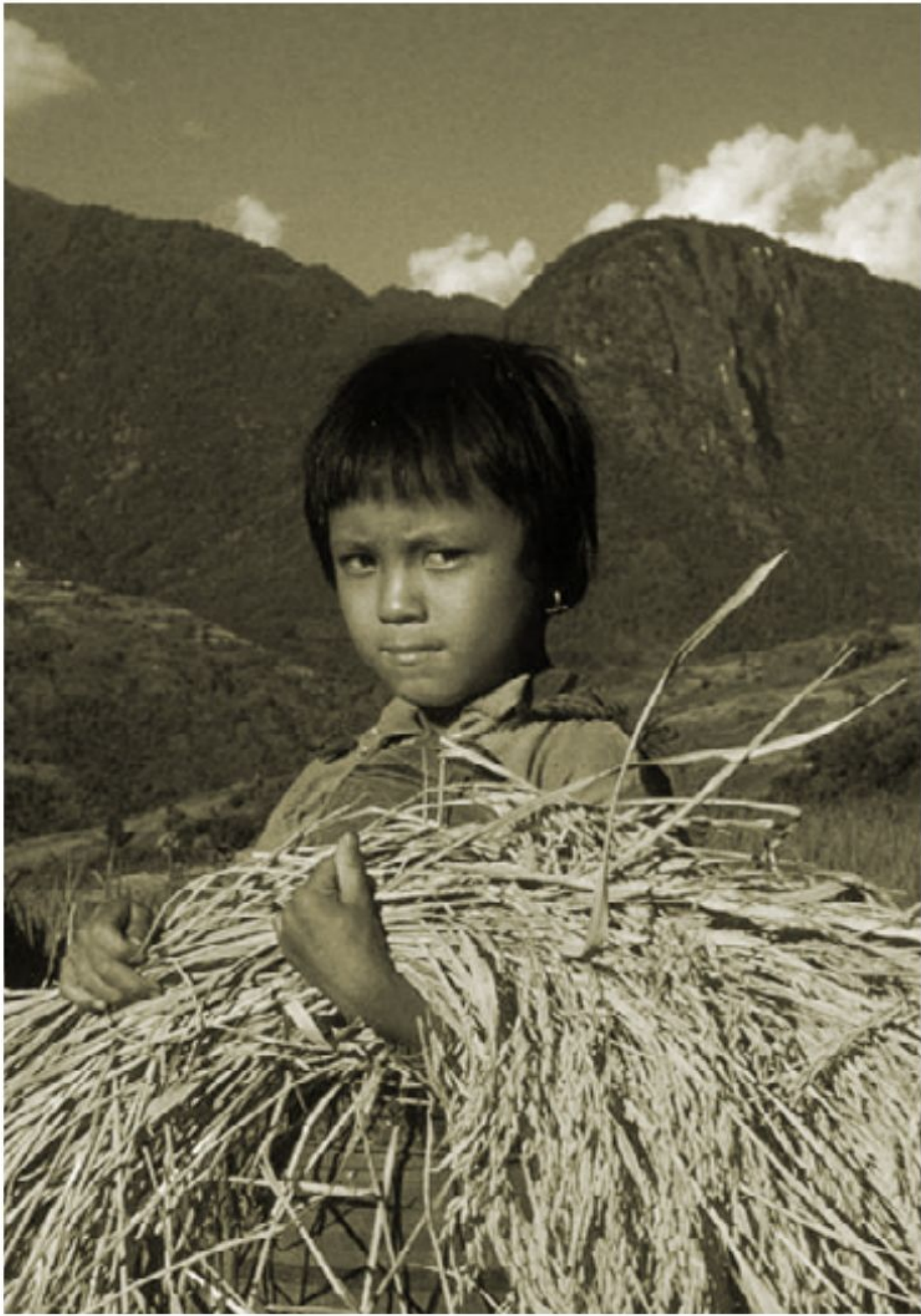


© CEphoto, Uwe Aranas

Showing that children in prehistoric communities held important cultural and community value, archaeologist Steven Dorland at the University of Toronto, Canada, analyzed ceramic shards from a prehistoric village in what is now southern Canada discovering six-year-old and younger fingernail imprints in the 15th-century debris. Among the recovered artifacts at this site, youngsters' misshapen starter pots were also fired, which shows children in those societies had "a certain level of social value," said Dorland.

Child labor is defined today by the International Labour Organisation as "work that deprives children of their childhood, their potential, and their dignity, and that is harmful to their physical and mental development." It is truly heartbreaking to think that in our current paradigm of sophisticated technology and communications, where we know what is happening on the surface of Mars in real-time, that child labor still exists as one of the greatest social hurdles to human rights worldwide. As the modern world became more aware and horrified by the prevalence of child labor, the accounts of child laborers worldwide have "dropped from 245 million to 168 million between 2000 and 2012" according to an article in *The World Accounts*.

Poverty and the lack of education are considered as the main causes of child labor and in an ideal world, our children, our future, should be given the opportunity to have childhoods and to develop their interests, skills, talents, and abilities in positive, safe environments; not working in factories, fields, and mines without pay, in subhuman conditions. The fact we are still aspiring to this, even with 6,000 years of practice, is disgraceful. ■



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Clockwise from top;
A little girl making money for her family by posing with a snake in a water village of Cambodia, 2009

Child harvesting rice, location unknown

Cowherd children in the Ethiopian highlands, 2009

Manuel, the young shrimp-picker, five years old, and a mountain of child-labor oyster shells behind him. Biloxi, Mississippi, 1911



BY JOANNA
GILLAN

Knot tying is an essential skill and every Boy Scout learns how to tie them. Knotted cords were used by ancient Egyptian Rope Stretchers, royal surveyors who measured out fields. Every knot indicated a length of a 10 royal cubits (about 17 feet). Stretchers pulled on the rope in order to take the sag out of it, as well as to keep the measures uniform.

ANCIENT EGYPTIAN 'BOY SCOUTS' LEARNED THE ROPES

Never before has ancient childhood been researched so systematically than in the mass of 7,500 ancient Egyptian papyrus documents, analyzed by social historian Ville Vuolanto of

the University of Oslo, who joined forces with Dr. April Pudsey of the University of Newcastle in an epic project dubbed *Tiny Voices from the Past: New Perspectives on Childhood in Early Europe*. Their research revealed that in Roman Egypt, 14-year-old boys were enrolled in a youth organization in order to learn to be good citizens, similar to modern-day Boy Scouts.

The documents originate from Oxyrhynchos in Egypt, a large town of more than 25,000 inhabitants, which flourished during the first 500 years BC. Oxyrhynchos hosted Egypt's most important weaving industry and was also the Roman administrative center for the area. A century ago, archaeologists discovered thousands of papyri in what had once been the town's rubbish dumps.

Only boys born to free-born citizens – be they Egyptian, Greek or Roman – were entitled to be members of the town's youth organization. Their families would necessarily have been quite affluent and have had an income that placed them in the '12 drachma tax bracket'. It is uncertain how large a proportion of the population would have qualified, probably somewhere between 10 and 25

percent.

For boys, the transition from childhood to adult life started with enrolment in the 'gymnasium'. Some started working before reaching their teens and might have served an apprenticeship of two to four years. The researchers found about 20 apprenticeship contracts, most of them relating to the weaving industry. Males percent to be fully adults until they married in their early twenties. Girls were married off much younger.

Slave children could also become apprentices, and their contracts were of the same type as the boys of free-born citizens. Slaves lived with their owners, while free-born children generally lived with their parents. But life was different for slave children, nonetheless. Documents show that children as young as two were sold and separated from their parents.

Little is known about the lives of children until they turn up in official documents, which is usually not before they are in their early teens. It seems that children began doing light work between the ages of seven and nine. Typically, they might have worked as goatherds or were sent to collect wood or dry animal dung for fuel.

"It's like putting together a jigsaw puzzle. By examining papyri, pottery fragments with writing, toys, and other objects, we are trying to form a picture of how children lived in Roman Egypt," explained Vuolanto. ■





Boys to Monks

In Myanmar, infants as young as 18 months can enter Buddhist orders, though more commonly children begin training between the ages of five and 15. The boys are considered novices until they reach the age of 20, when they can become fully-fledged monks. Young novices study hard, rising at four a.m. for morning service, before going out to collect alms. Their afternoons are spent learning religious scriptures and academic subjects. They are required to fast from noon until dawn. Becoming a novice monk is a great honor for families. It is also a way out of poverty. Children who are orphaned, abandoned, abused, or disabled can find free education, regular meals, and a welcome home in a Buddhist temple.

Three novices in the pagoda.
Sutipond | AdobeStock

DIVINE BABIES

CHILD HERO CULTS OF ANCIENT GREECE

A 'hero' in Greek mythology usually designates a man whose super-human exploits and semi-divine parentage make him a person of legend. Heroes were venerated at their own shrines, but adult superheroes were not the only ones honored; deceased young ones, highlighted by Prince Opheltes and the children of Heracles and Medea, had their own hero cults too.

In her book, *An Archaeology of Ancestors*, Duke University classicist Carla Antonaccio discusses the difficulty of defining a "hero" who deserves his own cult. She ties the idea into ancestor worship. Some hero cults honored mythological figures, like Heracles, and some honored real-life folks, such as the Spartan general Brasidas who died a long time ago. But the clear distinction between "fictional" and "real" characters (and what defines fact versus fiction, vis-a-vis legend) is likely more of a modern retrojection than one the Greeks may have made.

What is unique about infant hero cults is that the revered children never got the chance to commit heroic acts like Theseus, Heracles, or Odysseus, but infant heroes are defined by the circumstances of their deaths. A baby who died young could not have slain monsters, founded cities, or saved damsels, yet there is evidence of infant and child cults in cities all over Greece.

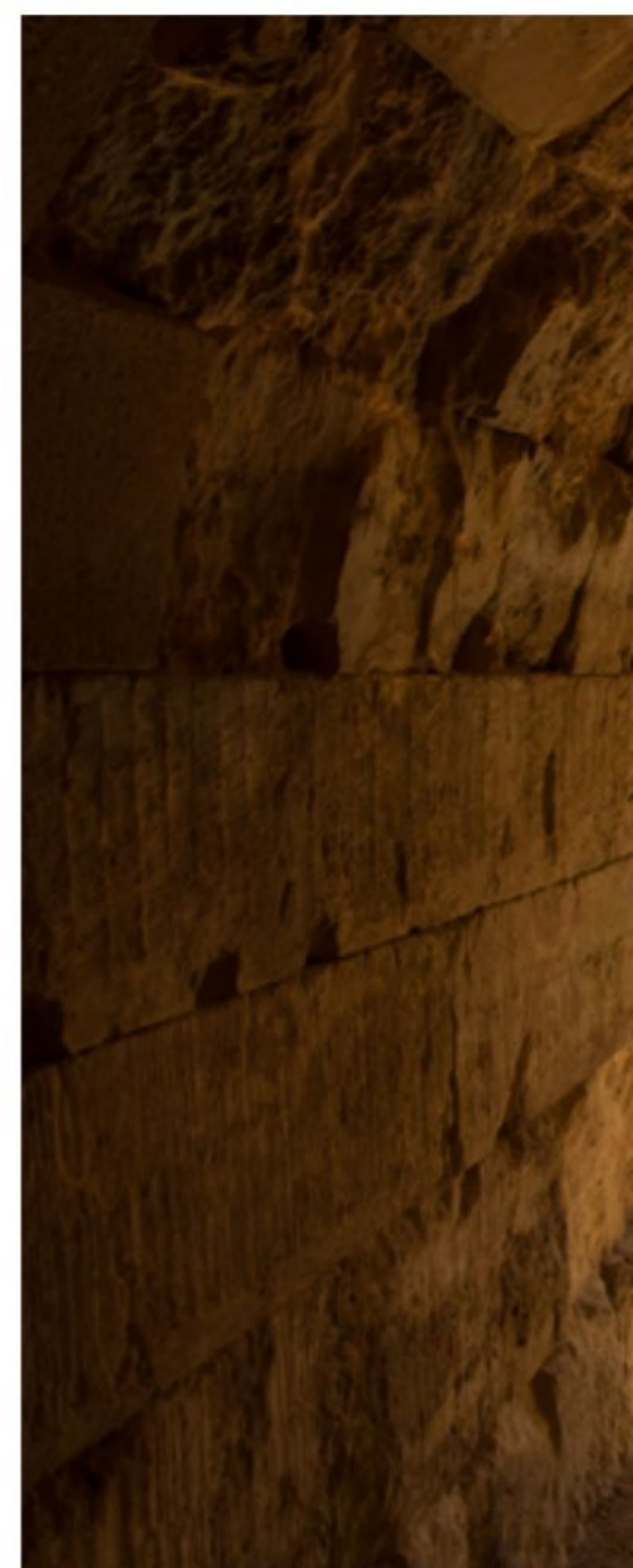
Instead of what they did during their

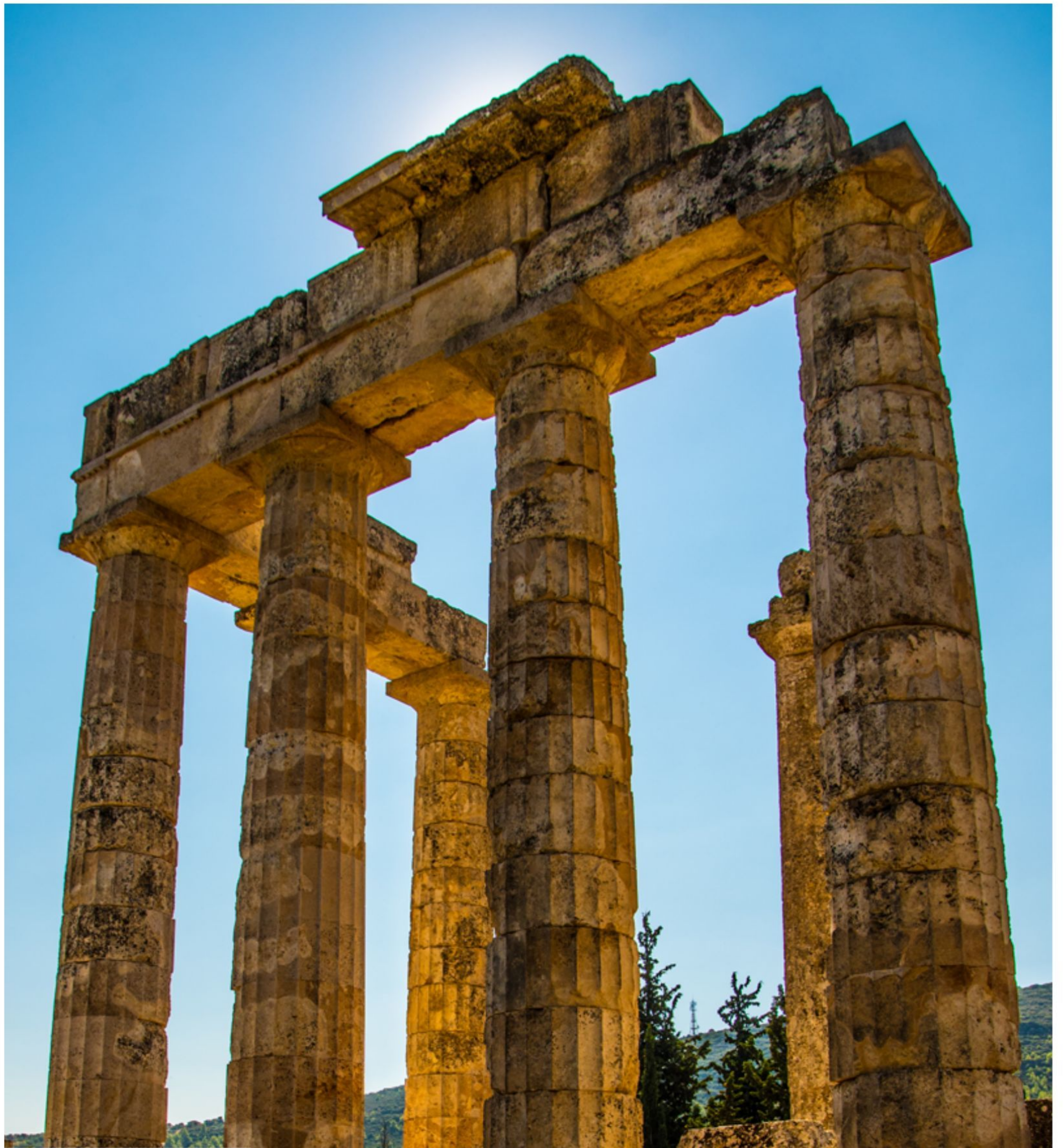
BY CARLY SILVER



lives, they are defined by the circumstances of their deaths. Why? Perhaps, as Corinne Pache suggests in her monograph on the subject, the preoccupation with children's deaths and honoring the deceased reflects real-life parental anxiety about infant mortality in the ancient world.

It's noteworthy that baby graves and the cults honoring them are often centered in the area from which the child originated or where they died. Pausanias notes that in the city of Nemea, there is one famous baby's grave. Meet Opheltes, a prince of Nemea who died in a cypress grove near Zeus's temple in his hometown.





Opposite: Heracles as a
babe strangling a snake

Right: Temple of Zeus at
Nemea in Greece

Below: Entrance tunnel
from where the athletes
enter to the ancient
stadium at Nemea



THE HERO CULT OF INFANT PRINCE OPHELTES

What happened? When a bunch of heroes on their way to Thebes came along looking for directions to a spring of water, they asked infant Opheltes' nurse which way to go. The lady plopped him down in the grass for a second; while she was looking away, he was killed by a snake. That nurse wasn't innocent - she was the one-time queen Hypsipyle, who sanctioned the murder of men on the island of Lemnos while hiding away her own father. Pseudo-Apollodorus observes that seers interpreted the death of Opheltes to indicate the inevitable failure of the traveling heroes' mission against Thebes.

Back in Nemea, Opheltes' tomb received lots of glory in later years. Opheltes' tomb "is a fence of stones, and within the enclosure are altars," alongside which is the honored tomb of Opheltes' father, Lycurgus.

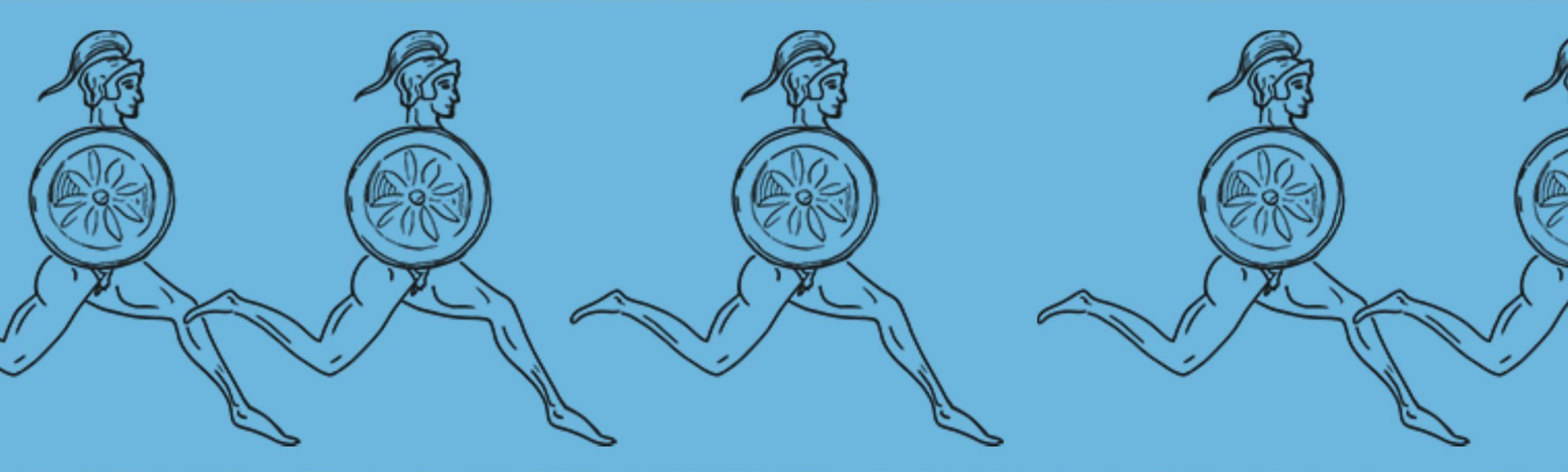
The Nemean Games, highlighted by a foot race in which the contestants wore armor, were held in Opheltes' honor. Who founded them? The Seven Against Thebes, who indirectly caused his death while asking for directions, as a means of lessening their guilt, honoring the infant's ghost, and averting any plans of retaliation by the bereaved royal house of Nemea.

The association with Opheltes remained consistent throughout history.

As historian Donald Kyle noted in his *Sport and Spectacle in the Ancient World*, even the visual elements of the Nemean Games – the judges donned black robes, the winner wore a crown made of wild celery leaves (according to some versions, Opheltes died not in a cypress grove, but in a patch of wild celery) to evoke his memory.

THE NEMEAN GAMES,
HIGHLIGHTED BY A FOOT
RACE IN WHICH THE
CONTESTANTS WORE
ARMOR, WERE HELD IN
OPHELTES' HONOR





Johann Christian Reinhart, 1816

To complete his transformation from tragically deceased human child to full, semi-divine hero, Opheltes received a heroic funeral, described by the poet Statius in his Latin epic poem *Thebaid*, about the Seven Against Thebes' misadventures. Opheltes received a new moniker from the prophet Amphiaraus—Archemoros, or “beginner of death,” signifying how poorly the Theban mission would go.

HERACLES' SLAIN CHILDREN HONORED

As nice as it is to honor those gone too soon and too young, why would people go to such an extent for a baby or child? In the case of Heracles' slain children, (killed by their father or Medea's sons, and sometimes reported to have been murdered by their mother), the citizens of the city where the children are buried perform actions that atone for these deaths, no matter whose fault they were.

To compensate for the deaths of Medea's sons, whether by their mom or the people of the city of Corinth, later Corinthians must still honor those gone by. If they killed the children, they would do so to propitiate the ghosts and expunge their own guilt; if Medea did it, perhaps they ritually substituted themselves for Medea, a onetime resident of Corinth, the king of which helped contribute to her downfall.

Heracles's dead children were honored in Thebes, the home city of their mother, Megara.

Pindar, however, refers to his eight sons as “bronze-armored”, so perhaps the boys were of age by the time they were killed, and later sources made them younger so as to lessen the charge. Perhaps it was seen as appropriate for the Thebans to honor the deceased heirs of their murdered princess, just as the people of Nemea did for Opheltes, their one-time prince and heir (even though they weren't the ones who caused his death).

If Medea never really atoned for her sons' deaths, then the people of her city, in a way, did it on her behalf. By honoring deceased youngsters with close ties to their own cities, and by involving their own children in initiatory rites dedicated to lost children, perhaps citizens of said town hoped to ensure that similar fates would not befall their own families, Antonaccio theorizes. ■

The Greek divine hero Heracles was said to have had a number of sons and at least four daughters. (The Romans knew him as Hercules, and he was said to have sired over 100 children!) According to varying myths, Heracles married a Theban princess, Megara. In a fit of madness caused by the goddess Hera, Heracles killed his wife and children. In grief, he fled to the Oracle of Delphi and served King Eurystheus for 10 years, undergoing the famous Twelve Labors of Heracles.



Heracles and
his child
Telephus

BRED FOR BATTLE

HOW SPARTAN BOYS BECAME WARRIORS

BY CALEB STROM

The ancient Greek city-state of Sparta is famous for being a city almost entirely dedicated to the art of war. An important historical question is, how did the city get this way?

At the age of seven, Spartan boys would be taken from their families and enrolled in an institution known as *agoge* in which they would go through a rigorous physical education. They were also taught reading, writing, poetry, and politics, but much of Spartan education consisted of physical training and increasing the student's endurance, resistance to pain, and survival skills.

The boys were purposefully underfed so that they would have to become adept at stealing food without getting caught. If they did get caught, they would be severely punished. This was likely done to teach the boys to develop stealth skills which would be important as soldiers. Furthermore, they would be regularly beaten and flogged to increase their ability to endure pain.

They were only given one garment,

but not given any shoes so that the soles of their feet would become tough. It was said that bare-footed Spartan warriors could outrun any shoe-clad Greek citizen of another city-state.

Beginning around 700 BC, the Spartans conquered the region of Messenia and incorporated the Messenians into the Spartan population as slaves or 'helots'. The helots were largely composed of the same people-group, which gave them solidarity. This led to the helots uniting in revolt multiple times against Spartan subjugation, which necessitated the Spartans to always be ready for war, to protect their lifestyle and city.

The Spartan education system was unique in being entirely focused on preparing a city for war. The system was very narrow compared to those of other city-states, but its uniqueness and focus were successful, at least for a while, in creating a warrior culture and an austere soldier-city that could stand against almost any opponent, even the mighty Achaemenid Persian Empire in 480 BC. ■

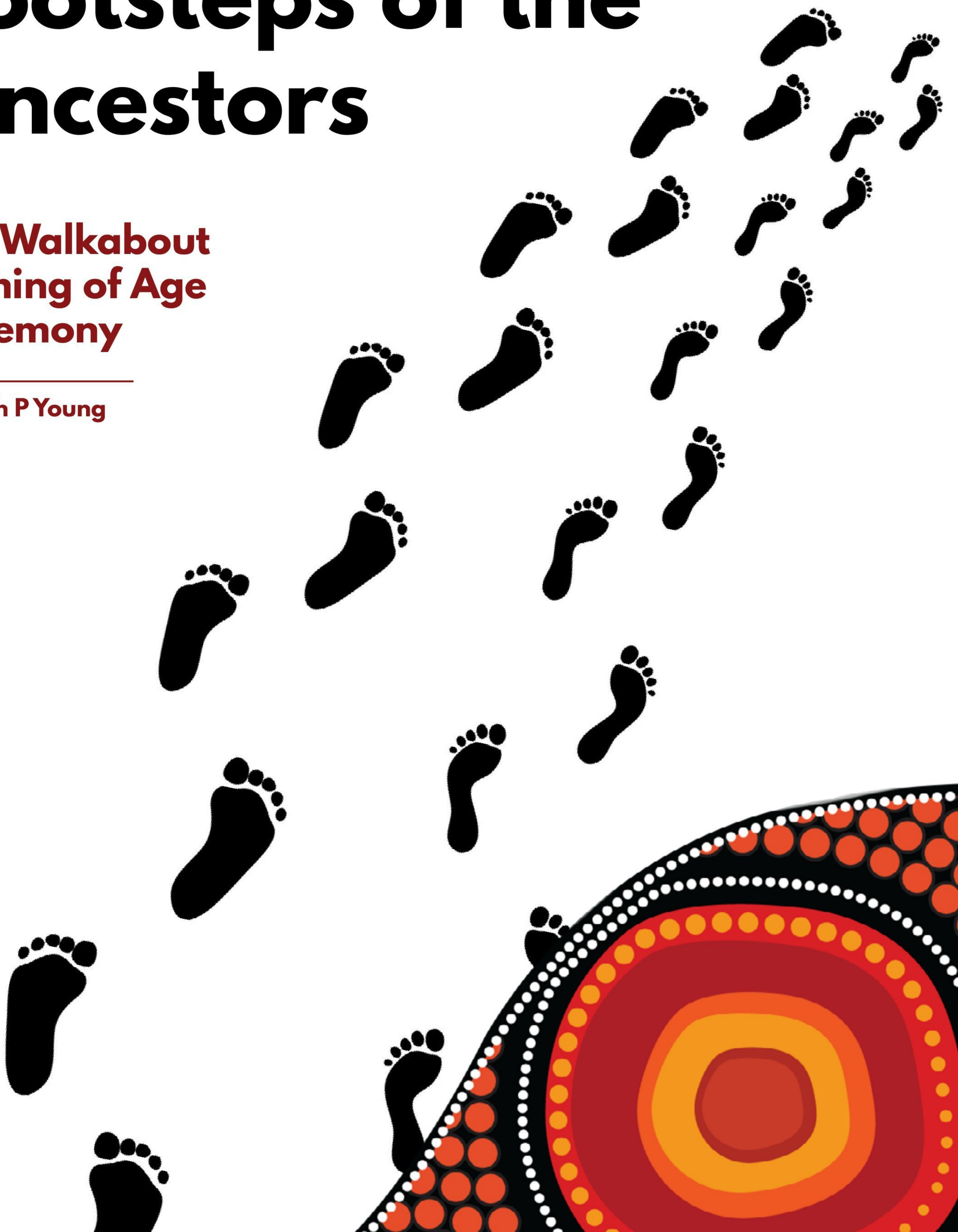


Spartan boys practising archery

Following the Footsteps of the Ancestors

**The Walkabout
Coming of Age
Ceremony**

Sarah P Young



The 'coming of age' ceremony is a significant rite among many cultures. It is an important milestone and it marks a difficult time for many young people. They are too old to be considered children, but they have not yet found their place in the adult world. For some cultures, it is considered a dangerous time. The age at which a person is initiated in a coming of age ceremony varies—Jewish Bar and Bat Mitzvahs take place when the young person is 13 years old and a Quinceañera celebration is held on a girl's 15th birthday in many Spanish speaking and Latino populations, for example. Other ceremonies rely on physical changes such as the onset of puberty. The way the event is marked also varies by region and culture – sometimes it is a simple party and other times it is a religious ceremony. In recent years there has even been a rise in secular coming of age ceremonies, which aim to prepare adolescents for adult life. As religion now has a less integral role in

many societies, the transformative adolescent years have remained difficult to navigate and the need to observe the time has remained important. These secular coming of age ceremonies are especially popular in Scandinavia, but they are starting to become more commonplace in North America.

But whether they are spiritual, cultural, or secular, coming of age ceremonies all have a few things in common.

They acknowledge that the threshold between childhood and adulthood is a special and often difficult time for young people and they reassure them that as adults they are a welcome addition to their social or cultural group. Many of them offer a guiding hand to young people who may be struggling with their identity and offer the advice of an older figure (for example a Rabbi or a tribal elder) that teaches the young person the skills they need to thrive as an adult.



ABORIGINAL COMING OF AGE

The coming of age ceremony is an important aspect of Aboriginal culture too and for this reason, more than one Aboriginal coming of age ceremony is practiced today. In Eastern Australia, an initiation ceremony called a Bora is held for young boys who have achieved the status of men.

While the initiation varies between the Aboriginal cultures and regions, the ceremony is an intense one. The boys are subjected to physically demanding activities such as scarification, tooth removal, and genital mutilation. They are taught the secrets of the tribe's spiritual beliefs through traditional songs, dances, and lore. The ritual is held at a special ceremonial ground and it is attended by a number of men.

This intense group initiation helps a young man to feel like he's becoming 'one of the men.' They are physically accepted by the other men and share in group experiences which cement the bonds between people who have traditionally relied on each other for safety during grueling activities such as hunting and warfare. The Bora encourages camaraderie. But the Bora is not the only coming of age ceremony still practiced by Aboriginal Australians, and the second is the polar opposite of the adrenaline-fueled group ceremony.

THE WALKABOUT CEREMONY

The Walkabout coming of age ceremony is a rite of passage for young men between the ages of 10 and 16 (though most commonly 12-13) years old. It is often misunderstood by those with little knowledge of Aboriginal cultural practice.

It is undoubtedly a physical rite of passage – the young man undertaking it must live a temporarily nomadic lifestyle and survive alone – but it is also a spiritual one. It is both a spiritual and physical journey over the ancestral Aboriginal lands which takes place over a period as long as six months.

Walkabout is both physically and mentally demanding, particularly for such young men, and they must prove they are ready for the task before they gain approval for the ceremony from Aboriginal elders.

Walkabout is both physically and mentally demanding



In the years before the Walkabout, they are prepared by the elders, who give them advice both about surviving physically and about their imminent adult lives. They receive the secret knowledge of their tribes and about how to survive in the unforgiving lands which have been home to their ancestors for so many generations.

THE PHYSICAL CEREMONY

Young men who are undertaking their Walkabout ceremony are dressed distinctively so people know this is what they are doing. Their bodies are decorated with paint and ornaments. Just like the Bora, the way they are decorated varies based on region – some boys will receive a permanent mark when they set out, such as scarification or extraction of a tooth. Traditionally, a boy on Walkabout will dress only in a loincloth.





Waugals (yellow triangles with a black snake in the center) are the official Bibbulmun Track trailmarkers between Kalamunda and Albany in Western Australia. Always remember to "Follow the Waugals!"

Björn Christian Torrissen/CC BY SA 3.0



● Pumi People, China

At age 13, Pumi girls participate in a ceremony in which they step on a piece of fat with their right foot and then a bag of rice with their left foot to ensure future health and abundance.

● Hamar Tribe, Ethiopia

Between the age of 12-16, boys of the Hamar tribe undertake a rite of passage in which they must jump naked over a cow or castrated bull four times.

● Mentawi Tribe, Indonesia

Around the ages of 10-14, girls of the Mentawi tribe have a coming-of-age ritual in which they get their teeth sharpened with a chisel.

● Satere-Mawe Tribe, Brazil

13-year-old boys of the Satere-Mawe tribe undergo a grueling ritual in which they must wear gloves full of bullet ants, whose bite is 20 times more painful than a wasp.

● Pentecost Island, Vanuatu

Boys of the small Pacific island nation of Vanuatu jump off a 98-foot-tall tower with a bungee-like vine tied to their ankles. The vine lacks elasticity and a miscalculation in its length can lead to broken bones or even death.

The journey they undertake can cover as much as 1000 miles. The Australian landscape is famously dangerous and unforgiving, with soaring temperatures and poisonous insects and snakes. And so, to survive the ordeal of a Walkabout ceremony, the young man must be able to adequately and safely provide for himself. He needs to know how and where to get clean water, to build safe shelter, and to hunt for food. He must be able to hunt, fish, and identify edible plants.

The plants the young man learns to gather are traditional. They eat bush tomatoes, Illawarra plums, quandongs, lilli pillies, muntari berries, wattle seeds, Kakadu plums, and bunya bunya nuts. He must also know which plants are medicinal and be able to attend to his own wounds and injuries, so he is not impaired and unable to continue.

Because of its demanding nature, the Walkabout ceremony is also seen as a test of bravery. The boy risks getting lost or injured daily, and sleeping alone in the wilderness at night is something that requires a great deal of courage. The physically demanding challenges of surviving alone are different

from the difficult aspects of the Bora ceremony, but they are more likely to have a long term effect on the young men.

SPIRITUAL GOALS AND NAVIGATING THE LAND

While the physical aspect of the Walkabout ceremony helps young men prove they are capable members of their society, the Walkabout is not only about learning to survive alone. When the boy is going through this rite of passage, he must use the time alone to reflect upon spiritual matters and discover who he is as an individual.

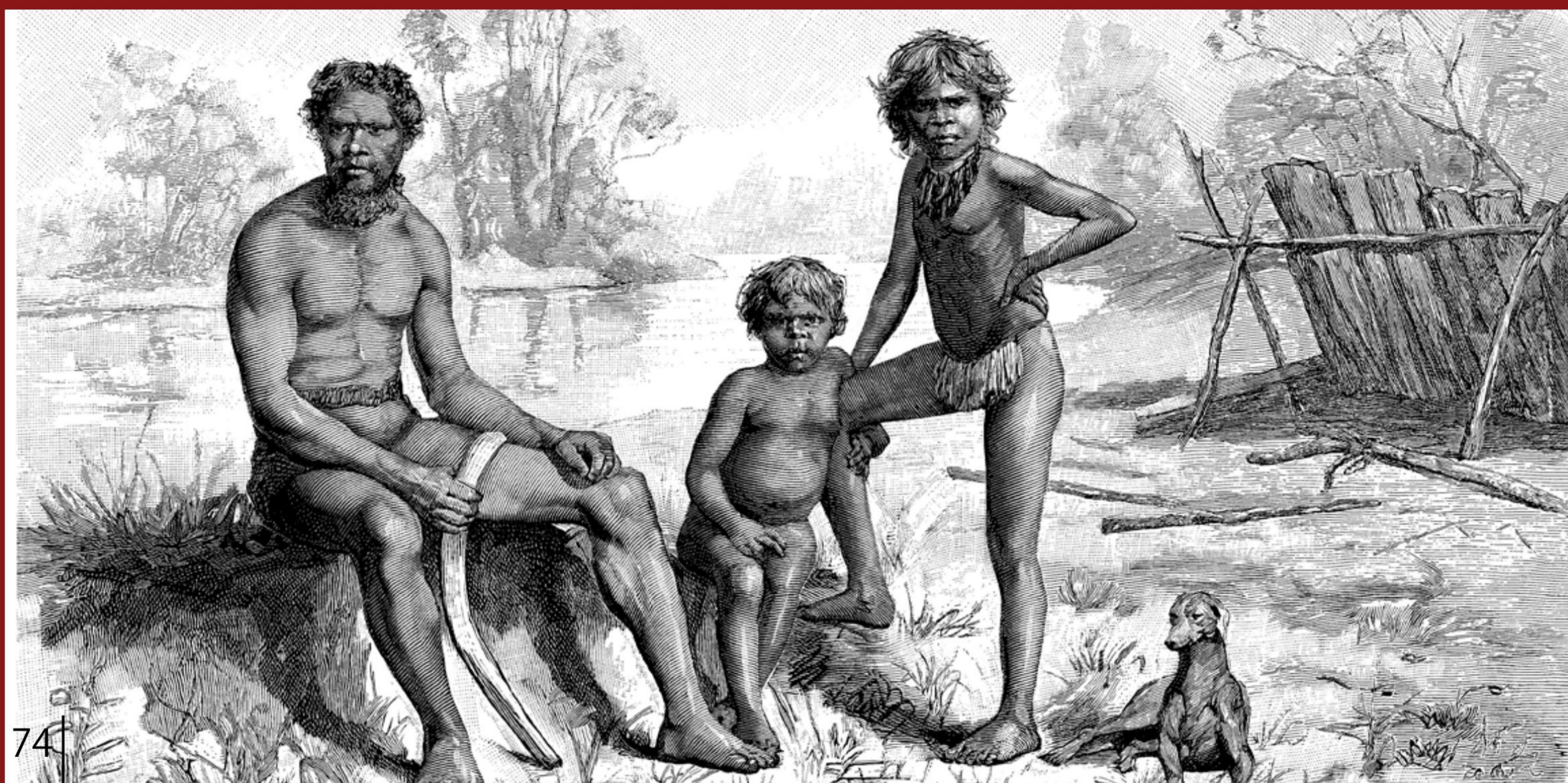
He is expected to reflect on his relationship with his ancestral land, with nature, and to connect with those who have been through the same rite of passage before him. He is supposed to think of his ancestors as he undertakes the Walkabout and to honor them.

He is taught to sing traditional spiritual songs known as 'songlines.' These songs are extremely special – they are not just a way to pass the time, but a way to navigate the treacherous landscape. The boys are not given modern instruments such as compasses or drawn

maps, and the songs describe the landscape and milestones such as rivers and rock formations, so the boy makes his journey with the aid of a spoken map. The songs guide the young men to hunting grounds for prey such as wallabies and describe the location of seeds and wild fruits for cooking.

Preserving nature and respecting the land is an integral part of Aboriginal culture and being able to interpret the songs is important. Attaining food without depleting resources can mean traveling long distances while supplies closer to home regenerate and regrow - the songlines reflect this.

The songlines also describe areas of spiritual importance and significant historical events. As the young men make their journey with the aid of the songlines, they learn about the important places of their ancestors and see the places first hand. Finally, the songlines give thanks to the earth for her resources - and during Walkabout the importance of respecting the earth and the resources it provides is reaffirmed and, perhaps, more clearly understood.



The Aborigine's believe they are guided by a higher spiritual power when they are making their Walkabout journey. When the boys return from the Walkabout ceremony they are considered men. They have not only proven they are able to survive alone, but that they are spiritually awakened and ready to take on more responsibilities and play a more important role in their communities.

WALKABOUT TODAY

The traditional Walkabout ceremony is still known today and there are some Aboriginal boys who consider it an extremely important part of their identity and undertake the rite of passage in the traditional way. However, as times have changed in recent years the ceremony is becoming less commonplace.

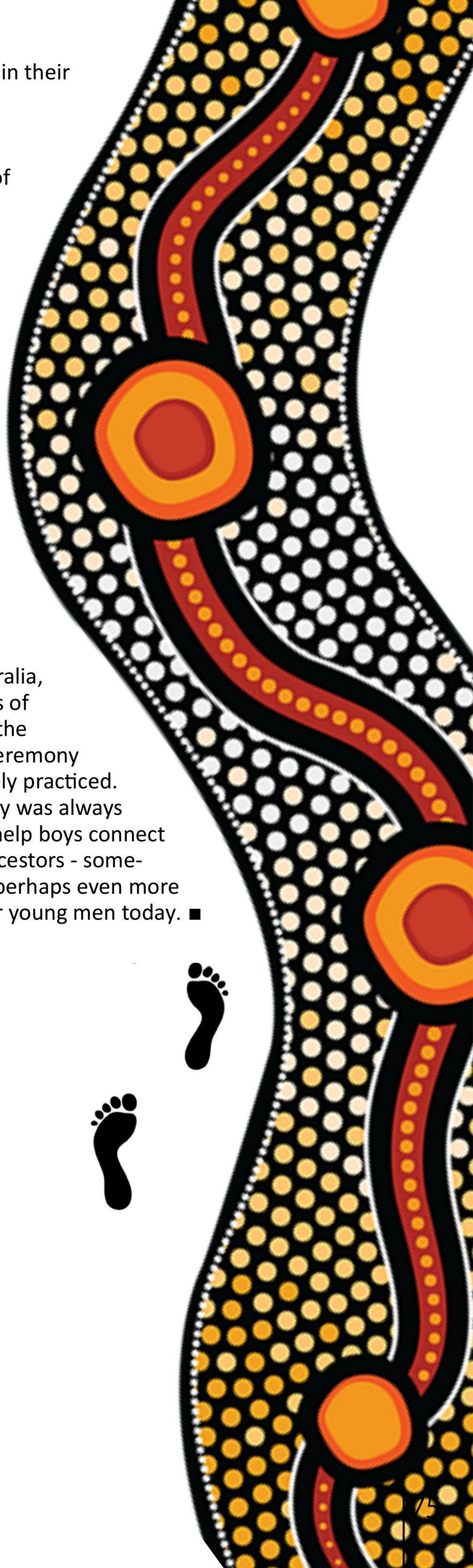
Today, some young men want to complete Walkabout but do not feel comfortable doing so on foot. Others are unable to commit to a long term Walkabout over the course of many months due to school or work obligations.

This has resulted in the Walkabout ceremony evolving and adapting to modern times. Young men may choose to experience the Walkabout as a road trip, driving through their ancestral lands rather than traversing them on foot.

This means they lose out on the physically demanding aspects of the Walkabout, and yet it is still a valuable rite of passage which they want to undertake. Perhaps this is because the spiritual aspects of the Walkabout ceremony are so important, even now. The Aboriginal Australians have fought very hard to hold onto their cultural traditions, and for young Aborigine men, this is a way for them to partake in a traditional ceremony that can guide them at a

difficult time in their lives.

Some people believe that the feelings of helplessness experienced by some young Aboriginal men, who find it hard to determine their place in Aboriginal society and their identities as Aboriginal men in modern-day Australia, would be less of a problem if the Walkabout ceremony was still widely practiced. The ceremony was always intended to help boys connect with their ancestors - something that is perhaps even more important for young men today. ■



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A HANUKKAH MYSTERY EXPLAINED

CAN THE FAVORITE HUE OF THE HERETIC PHARAOH EXPLAIN THE MOST SYMBOLIC COLOR OF JUDAISM?

BY JONATHON A. PERRIN

With the upcoming winter celebration of Hanukkah, the world will once again be reminded of the importance of the color blue to that holiday, and to Judaism in general. It is found on the flag of Israel and its coat of arms, in synagogues, and on prayer shawls around the world. It also has a long history in Judaism, featuring prominently in the Torah, the oldest Jewish literature believed to have been written by Moses. It was the color of the Throne of God envisioned by Moses on Mount Sinai. It was the color of the high priest's robe and the curtains in the Tabernacle. It was also the color of the tassels,

or *tzitzit*, that Moses commanded the Israelites to wear, to remind them of God's law.

Rabbis in the Mishna and Talmud, as well as later exegetes like Maimonides and Rashi all, commented on the color blue, and they generally agreed that it represents the divinity of God, his eternal nature, and the glory of the heavens and of God's throne. The Talmud describes the color as resembling the ocean: "the ocean resembles the color of the sky, the sky resembles the purity of the sapphire (or *lapis lazuli*), and the sapphire resembles the throne of God...as it is written: 'Above the sky over their heads was the semblance of a throne, like sapphire in appearance.'"

This love of blue is very ancient and goes back to the time of Moses, the Jewish founder, over



a millennia before Hanukkah appeared in the Hasmonean period. It was his favorite color and he mentions it more than anyone in the Bible. Moses was the first Jew to adopt blue as the color of divinity, of God, and of holiness, and it eventually came to represent Hanukkah and Judaism as a whole. We know the superficial reasons why, but what secrets lie behind these reasons? Did Moses' love of blue simply come "out of the blue," or did it have antecedents in his mysterious youth?

ABOVE THE SKY OVER
THEIR HEADS WAS
THE SEMBLANCE OF A
THRONE, LIKE SAPPHIRE
IN APPEARANCE

"BLUE LEADER" – THE COLOR BLUE IN THE TORAH OF MOSES

The color blue features prominently in Jewish history, right from its beginnings in the writings of Moses: the Jewish Torah. These writings recount the story of the Exodus: Moses the great magician leading his people out of Egypt through the walls of water. Later, when he brings them to Mt. Sinai to receive the Law, he and his priests, ministers, and tribal leaders see a vision of the throne of God.

“And Moses and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and seventy of Israel’s elders went up. And they saw the God of Israel. And below His feet it was like a structure of lapis lazuli brick and like the essence of the skies for clarity.”

Exodus 24:9-10.

Moses also used blue dye for the garments of the priesthood and Tabernacle, calling it *tekhelet*. Some believe he himself wore it (as in the icon from Saint Catherine's Monastery at Mt. Sinai, and this blue color is mentioned almost 50 times in the Torah, always in connection to the priests. Moses commanded the tent curtains be made from yarn colored red, purple, and blue, and the loops used to fasten the curtains together via gold clasps were blue.

“He has filled them with wisdom of heart to do all the work of the cutter and the designer and the embroiderer in the blue (tekhelet) and in the purple (argaman) and in the scarlet (tola’at shani) and in the linen and the weaver: those who do every kind of work and form conceptions.”

Exodus 35:35

Blue fabric was used to cover all the utensils during travel, including the Ark of the Covenant and the Menorah. When creating the robes for his new priesthood, Moses commanded that Aaron, the high priest, wear a robe made entirely of blue cloth, and the numerous strings used to fasten the breastplate and the gold head plate were all blue.

A small amount of the priestly blue color was added by Moses to the tassels (*tzitzit*) of the prayer shawls (*tallits*) of all the Jewish people - a sign that the entire nation founded by Moses was



to be a "nation of priests" to the world. The commandment to wear *tekhelet tzizit* is even mentioned in the *Shema*, the most important daily prayer for Jews to recite. The Shema expresses the singular nature of God as well as his rightful place as king of the universe. It also reminds all Jews to wear *tekhelet*-dyed tassels on their shawls, in order to remind them of following God’s law, so that *“you will see it and bring to mind all of Yahweh’s commandments and will do them”* (Numbers 15:38-41).

I believe that in order to find the answer to the mystery of blue in Judaism, we must look back to Egypt. All the Jewish scriptures speak of a time when their Hebrew ancestors were slaves in Egypt and their miraculous liberation and exodus under their first leader Moses. It was also at this time that the color blue first appeared in

the scriptures: during the time of Moses and the Jewish bondage in Egypt. This is our first clue to the blue enigma.

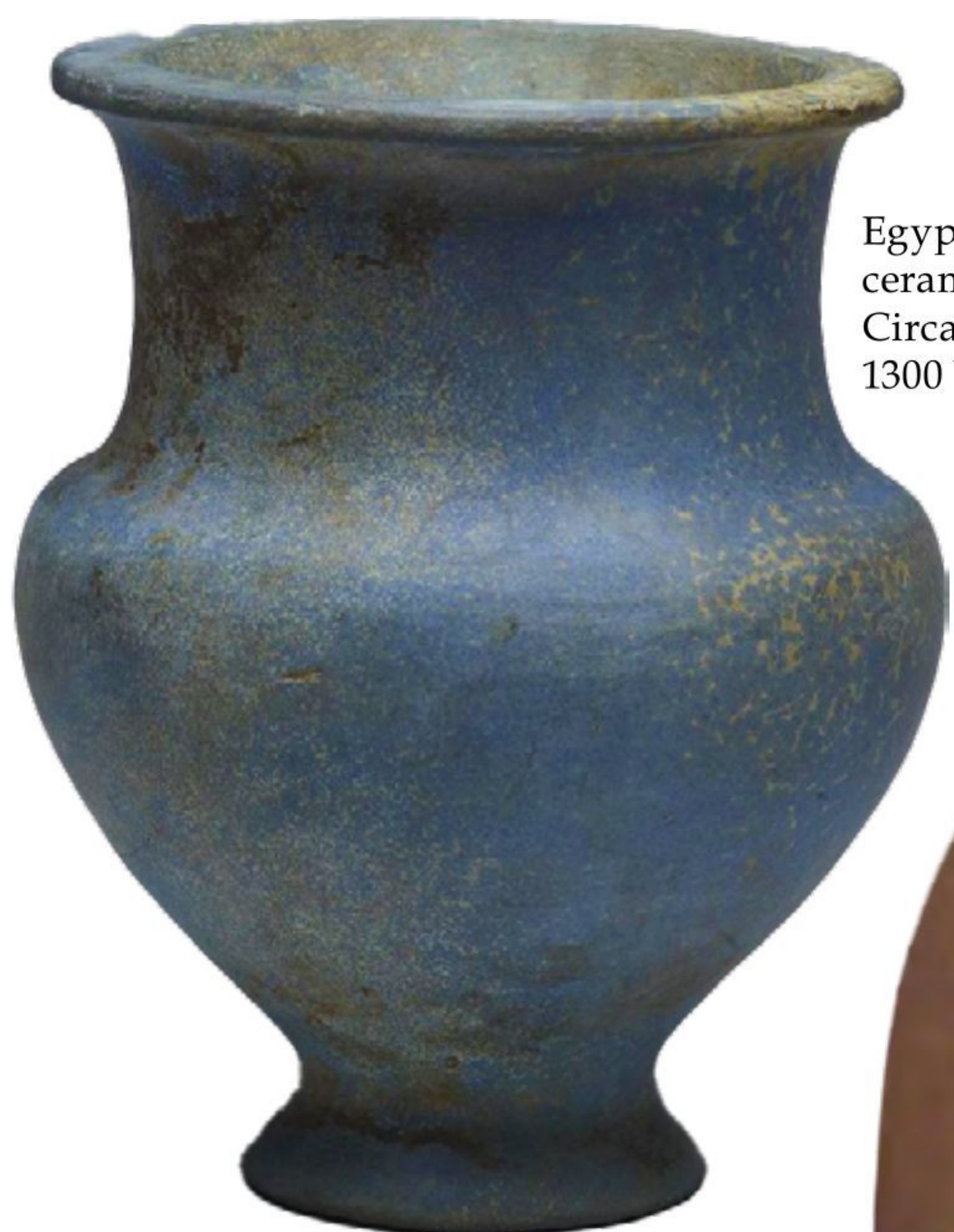
BLUE IN EGYPT - COLOR OF THE DIVINE

The pigment known as “Egyptian blue” is the oldest synthetic paint pigment, made from calcium copper silicate 5,000 years ago by heating crushed minerals to almost 1000°C. Other inorganic minerals were used to produce blue coloring in glass, ceramics, faience, and paint, including copper carbonates (azurite and malachite), copper sulfate (chalcantite), and cobalt aluminate-spinel mined from the western desert oases.

There were several shades of blue in ancient Egypt, ranging from dark-blue ground azurite and lapis lazuli (ultramarine) to cobalt pigments



that could be either dark or sky-blue (depending on grind-size) to “blue-green” turquoise shades. Both Amenhotep III and his son favored the darker cobalt blues, though they welcomed all shades of blue, including the light sky-blue cobalt hues on pottery. The most common color combination in their courts was white with blue.



Egyptian Blue ceramic vessel. Circa 1380 and 1300 BC

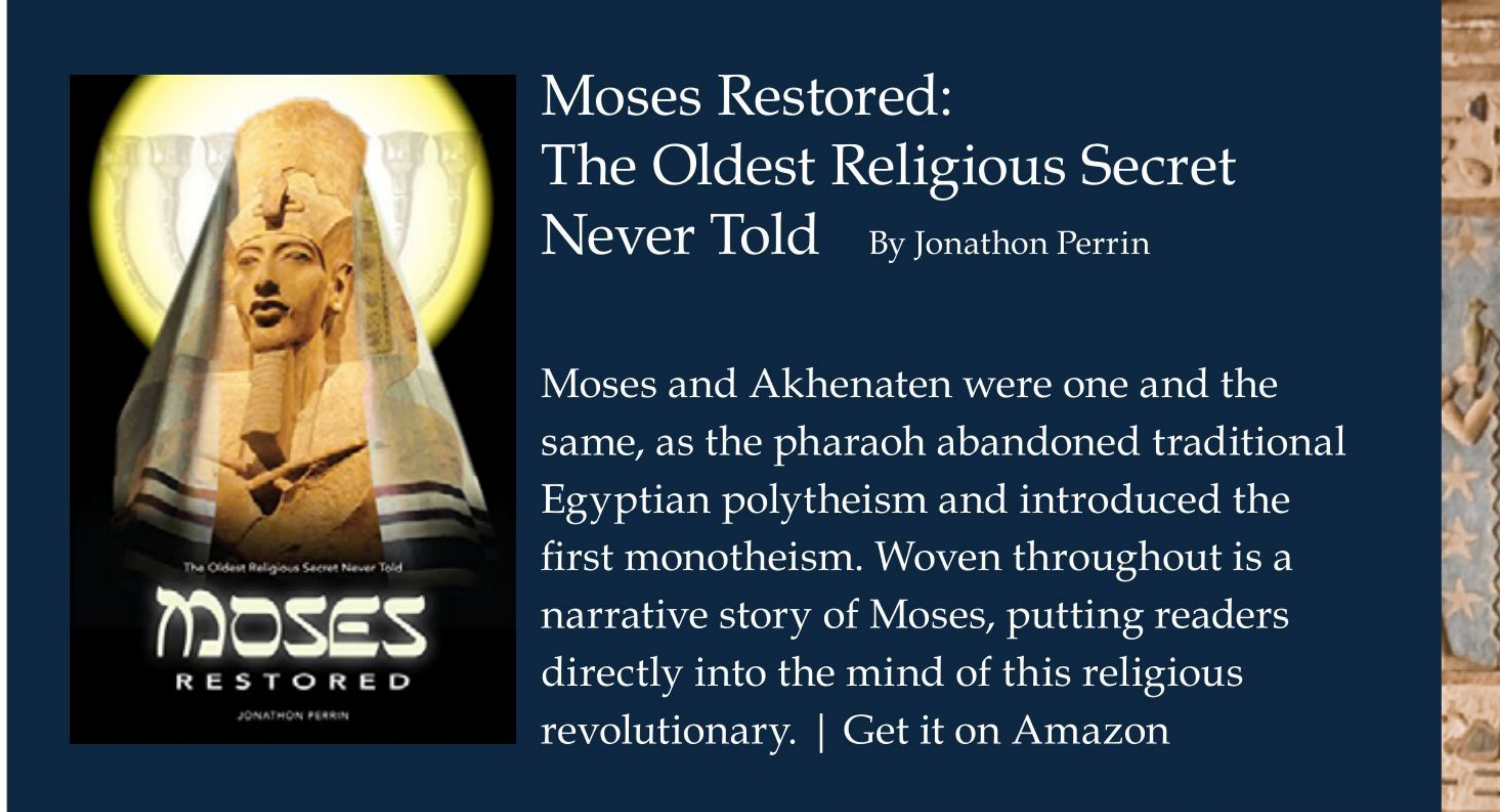


Small statue of Akhenaten wearing the blue crown. | Photo: Jon Bodsworth

Another connection back to Egypt concerns the symbolic importance placed on the color blue. It was used to represent divinity in general, such as the sky (Nut), air (Shu), the Nile (Hapi), and the waters of chaos during creation (Nun). It is interesting to note that tekhelet was believed to be the color of the sky and the sea and the ancient Egyptians used blue to depict their gods of the sky and the sea, Nut and Nun respectively, giving them blue skin and hair. It was also used to represent royalty and the high status of the elite class in general, in the same way purple did in Roman times.

The Egyptians derived blue indigo dye from the woad plant and white acacia pods. Garments dyed blue with these plant sources were found by Howard Carter in the tomb of Tutankhamun. Similar blue-dyed garments were found at Timna in Israel dating to 1300-1100 BC, the time period of the Exodus. These real archaeological textiles can help us imagine what the original curtains and robes of tekhelet made by Moses may have looked like.

There was perhaps no bluer period in Egyptian history than the Amarna period of Pharaoh Akhenaten. Blue dyes and pigments appeared everywhere during this time, in pottery, glass, faience, and paint. This can be partially explained with the connection between blue and divinity in Egypt. Akhenaten considered himself a deity, to be worshipped by his people. During his short 17-year reign, he abolished the Egyptian pantheon of gods and built an entirely new city to worship his one god, the Aten. He revolutionized religion, art, writing, and philosophy. During his contentious reign,



Moses Restored: The Oldest Religious Secret Never Told

By Jonathon Perrin

Moses and Akhenaten were one and the same, as the pharaoh abandoned traditional Egyptian polytheism and introduced the first monotheism. Woven throughout is a narrative story of Moses, putting readers directly into the mind of this religious revolutionary. | Get it on Amazon

he wore the standard royal blue garments and crowns, and occasionally depicted himself with the blue skin of divinity. Sometimes he depicted himself as the creator Atum-Ra, sometimes as his son Shu, god of air and sunlight, and sometimes just as his own deified self (such as a beautiful blue glass inlay of his face found at Amarna, comparable to the glass inlay of Nut). His god, the Aten, moved through the sky and he worshipped the sun under the open sky in the old tradition of Heliopolis.

The great wealth of the time led to a thriving glass and faience industry in Egypt, specifically at Amarna. Studies of a wide variety of artifacts, including pottery, quartz ceramics (or "faience"), glass, textiles, and jewelry, have indicated that blue shades were particularly favored across the new city. Both lighter and darker blues had a prominent place at Amarna and the color was associated with divinity, eternity, purity, and royalty (such as his royal signet ring). The king covered himself with gold and blue, the god's colors, and they feature on the death mask of Tutankhamen. The hieroglyphics were the sacred *medu netjer* ("words of the gods") and were painted blue, since they were known to only the elites: scribes, lector priests, and the king.





Roland Unger / CC BY SA 3.0

Seal ring of royal blue faience, imitating the shape of precious rings of the period. The inscription gives the throne name of King Amenophis IV (Akhenaten). Circa 1351 BC

Faience and Gold Necklace. Circa 711 BC

Standing faience hippopotamus. Circa 1961 -1878 BC

LAPIS LAZULI AND THE ROYAL CONNECTION

While the Torah mentions “sapphire” several times, we now know that sapphires were unknown in Egypt and the Middle East until Roman times. Hence the word used by the Egyptians as well as by Moses refers most likely to lapis lazuli. This glossy, semiprecious metamorphic stone was mined in northern Afghanistan, and was often presented as a gift to Akhenaten from the King of Mitanni.

Scholars have noted that this mineral was the exclusive domain of the high royalty, and only a handful of rulers had access to it, such as the Pharaoh and his “brothers,” the kings of Mitanni, Babylon, Assyria, and the Hittites. The kings of the Syrian states did not have access to lapis lazuli, and often requested that it be sent to them. Because of this rarity, its brilliance, color, and light gold-spattering of pyrite, it was likened to the color of the heavens, the skies, and the gods. It was often used in the most elite royal jewelry, such as pendants found in Tutankhamun's tomb.

This exact same analogy is seen in the Torah, in which lapis is described as composing the pavement of the throne of God in a vision by Moses. It was also the centerpiece of the breastplate worn by the high priest. Many argue that tekhelet looked like lapis, and



Classical Torah scrolls in a blue case

thus the stone's color featured in the Tabernacle and priesthood by covering the sacred Ark, Menorah, and High Priest with its deep blue hue. Some scholars even think the Ten Commandments were written on stones of lapis lazuli. Just the fact that Moses was familiar with lapis is astonishing in itself and suggestive of the fact he was

somehow, inexplicably, aware of the luxuries of Egyptian Pharaohs. There is another interesting connection between Moses and Amarna in that God was specifically referred to as a king, or ruling monarch, in both traditions. And in both cases, this was highlighted with the color blue. Moses envisioned Yahweh, his sole god, as a king with a throne in heaven of brilliant lapis stone. Akhenaten likewise declared his sole god a king, giving his holy name blue-painted cartouches and offering

SOME SCHOLARS
EVEN THINK THE TEN
COMMANDMENTS WERE
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LAPIS LAZULI



him gifts of rare lapis stone. Both imagined their respective deities as ensconced in glorious blue colors, and both worshipped in open-air courts before the sky, the blue symbolic “throne of God.”



Tyrargaman/CC BY SA 4.0

Natural silk dyed with Hexaplex trunculus pigment from Carthage

Hexaplex trunculus shell and blue pigment

Below: One of the Amarna letters in cuneiform writing on a clay tablet

TEKHELET IN THE LATE BRONZE AGE

The word tekhelet has an interesting history in Egypt. The etymology of this word has never been satisfactorily explained, for it does not correspond to any Egyptian word for “blue.” However, a closer, Semitic word appears in the Amarna Letters which date to the time of Akhenaten. In one letter written to Akhenaten before his wedding to the Mitannian princess Tadukhipa, the king of Mitanni, Tushratta, describes a long list of gifts for the dowry. These included several garments, shoes, robes, and caps of *takhiltu*-dyed wool. Thus, Akhenaten would have been familiar with the term takhiltu and its beautiful blue hue. Several scholars have suggested that takhiltu is equivalent to the



Hebrew tekhelet, and that it was, in fact, the dye produced from the *Hexaplex trunculus* snails.

Cuneiform records from Nuzi, a Syrian city that flourished during the reign of Akhenaten, also mention the same special dyed fabric that appears in the Amarna letters. These “Nuzi letters” mention takhiltu and even *argamannu* and *uqnatu*. These were all specific elite dyes for fabrics. Takhiltu was associated with royalty in many Middle East cultures besides Mitanni and Egypt. The Minoans traded these garments as early as 1750 BC, and the Phoenician King Hiram gifted curtains of both tekhelet and argaman to King Solomon for his Temple. Centuries later, during Esther's time, the Persian throne room of Xerxes was decorated with curtains of takhiltu.





This painting is a restoration of a scene of marsh life that formed a continuous frieze in the North Palace at Amarna. Circa 1353-1336 BC

THE AMARNA BLUES IN JUDAISM

The color blue holds an ancient and special place in Judaism, long associated with God's divinity and glory. As the Rabbis say, it is the color of the sea and the sky and the "royal lapis lazuli pavement of the throne of God" which Moses saw at Mount Sinai. This lustrous pavement formed the platform of Yahweh and was like "the essence of the skies for clarity."

Interestingly, blue was the color most favored by Akhenaten at Amarna. Traces of blue paint can still be seen on many inscriptions and statues. The king and queen both wore blue crowns, and blue glass and faience vases, vessels, make-up containers, pendants, and amulets have all been found. Blue paint was more common than any other color and was associated with the Pharaoh (blue headdress and blue beard), the sky and sea, and with language and writing.

As a king in Egypt, Akhenaten used blue paints to write the sacred words, to color his temples and palaces, and to dye his clothing and crowns. He used blue to depict the status of his god as king of the universe, such as giving him blue cartouches. Decades later, as Moses, I believe he would have maintained his love of blue, using it in the Tabernacle and priesthood. He would have continued his use of blue to symbolize his god's status as king of the universe, such as his blue throne. More importantly, as a former-monarch, he would have been uniquely familiar with lapis lazuli and its exquisite properties, and he would have been equally familiar with the word for the rich blue-dyed royal cloth: takhiltu.

Therefore by examining these ancient clues, we can direct a through-line from the modern Hanukkah celebration of blue all the way back to "blue-blooded" Egyptian concepts of royalty, divinity, and immortality. Bolstering this evidence are the connections between that other symbol of Hanukkah, the Menorah, and Akhenaten. But that must wait for another article. ■





4000 YEARS OF MAKING NEW YEAR RESOLUTIONS



WOULD YOU
BREAK A
PROMISE TO
A GOD?

New Year's resolutions are a popular practice. Countless people begin to consider them every year as December 31 rolls around. Although the big plans and ambitious goals can be difficult to follow through with, the idea of making (and breaking) New Year's resolutions has been a social phenomenon for the past 4,000 years, and can be traced back to the Babylonians.

A PROMISE TO THE GODS

Today, New Year's resolutions usually involve personal goals for self-improvement. The ancient Babylonians, on the other hand, made promises to their gods at the beginning of each year to return objects they borrowed and pay off their debts. They were more likely to keep their resolutions than most modern people because the ancient people of Mesopotamia believed that a kept promise meant the gods would treat them well. However, a broken promise would mean angering the gods and bringing unfortunate situations into one's life for the next 12 months.

Unlike the Western tradition of a new year starting in January, for the Babylonians, the first new moon following the vernal equinox—the day in late March with an equal amount of sunlight and darkness—heralded the start of a new year and represented the rebirth of the natural world. They marked the occasion with a massive religious festival called Akitu (derived from the Sumerian word for barley, which was cut in the spring) that involved a different ritual on each of its 11 days. During the Akitu, statues of the gods were paraded through the city streets, and rites were enacted to symbolize their victory over the forces of chaos. Through these rituals, the Babylonians believed the world was symbolically cleansed and recreated by the gods in preparation for the new year and the return of spring.

JANUS LOOKS TO THE PAST AND THE FUTURE

Ancient Romans kept with the tradition of making yearly resolutions. Their god of choice for this act was the two-faced Janus, the deity linked to beginnings and endings. Janus was believed to be capable of simultaneously looking back toward the old year and forward into the new one.

The Roman New Year originally corresponded with the vernal equinox. The early Roman calendar consisted of 10 months and 304 days, with each new year beginning at the vernal equinox. According to tradition, the calendar was created by Romulus, the founder of Rome, in the eighth century BC. However, over the centuries, the calendar fell out of sync with the sun, and in 46 BC the emperor Julius Caesar decided to solve the problem by consulting with the most prominent astronomers and mathematicians of his time. He introduced the Julian calendar, a solar-based calendar which closely resembles the more modern Gregorian calendar that most countries around the world use today. As part of his reform, Caesar instituted January 1 as the first day of the year, partly to honor the month's namesake – Janus.

THE PEACOCK VOW

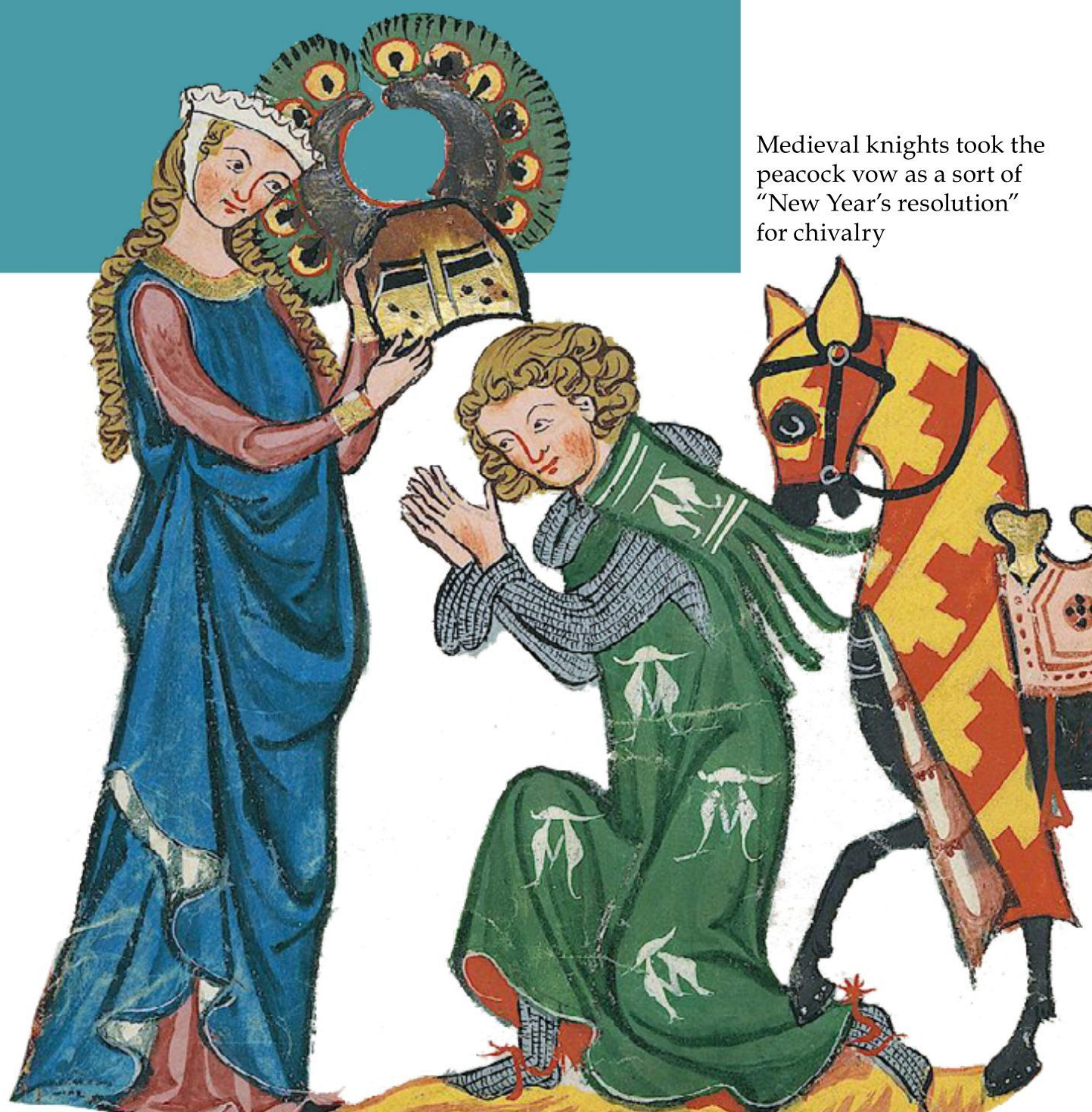
By the Medieval era, knights were taking the “peacock vow” (*les vœux du paon*). This oath was a promise to keep with their chivalric ways in the coming year. During the last feast of the Christmas week, they would place their hands on a peacock and recommit themselves for the year ahead.

“The flesh of the Peacock (or of the Pheasant) according to the old romances, was the peculiar diet of valiant knights and heart-stricken lovers, and its plumage was considered by the Provencal ladies the richest ornament with which they could deck the crowns they bestowed on the Troubadours, as rewards for the poetical talent displayed by them in singing the praises of love and valor. But it was on the day when a solemn vow was made that the Peacock (or Pheasant) became the great object of admiration, and whether it appeared at the banquet given on these occasions roasted or in its natural state, it always wore its full plumage, and was brought in with great pomp by a bevy of ladies, in a large vessel of gold or silver, before all the assembled chivalry. It was presented to each in turn, and each made his vow to the bird, after which it was set upon a table to be divided amongst all present, and the skill of the carver consisted in the apportionment of a slice to every one.”

Charles Dickens, All the Year Round



Medieval knights took the peacock vow as a sort of “New Year’s resolution” for chivalry



'A Dance to the Music of Time' by Nicolas Poussin, 1635



JANUS WAS BELIEVED
TO BE CAPABLE OF
SIMULTANEOUSLY
LOOKING BACK
TOWARD THE OLD
YEAR AND FORWARD
INTO THE NEW ONE



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10 OLDEST CHRISTMAS MARKETS

1 VIENNA, AUSTRIA 1298 AD

The first 'December Market' (rather than Christmas Market) was held in Vienna in 1298. It now hosts 20 markets of which the most popular is the Vienna Christmas World on Rathausplatz near Vienna's historic city hall. Visitors can ice skate on a 32,000-sq-foot ice rink.

2 MUNICH, GERMANY 1310 AD

The main city market overflows from Marienplatz towards the Christmas crib market and over into the Rindermarkt and the Cathedral. At the Wittelsbacherplatz, there is a recreation of a Middle Age Christmas market where some of the stallholders dress up in costumes and play music from that era.

3 FRANKFURT, GERMANY 1393 AD

The whole of central Frankfurt, including Friedrich-Stoltze-Platz, Hauptwache, Mainkai, Paulsplatz, and Römerberg has now been included in the festival. Look out for the tradition of Quetschemännchen—figures made out of prunes and nuts, which men sent to their sweethearts. If the figure was not returned to sender, he knew that he had a chance to win the hand of the girl.



4 DRESDEN, GERMANY 1434 AD

Dresden's Striezelmarkt was first held in 1434 and is considered the first genuine Christmas market. The Christmas arch - originally metal but now usually a wooden arch - displays candles and figures, stemming from the candles that the miners would hang from the entrance to the mine on the last working day before Xmas.

5 TALLINN, ESTONIA 1441 AD

Tallinn is the oldest capital city in Northern Europe and has one of the best-preserved medieval town centers in the world. The first Christmas tree at Tallinn's Town Hall Square was erected in 1441 by the Brotherhood of Blackheads (unmarried merchants), making it one of the earliest evidences of decorated trees for the Yuletide season.

6 NUREMBERG, GERMANY 1530 AD

‘Christkindlesmarkt’ in Nuremberg, Germany takes place during Advent in the Hauptmarkt, the central square in Nuremberg’s old town, and extends to adjoining squares and streets. The Nuremberg Christkind is selected among tall 16- to 19-year-old girl candidates and is then dressed in white and gold, with a golden crown and angel-wing-like long, golden sleeves.

7 STRASBOURG, FRANCE 1570 AD

Christkindelsmärik is on the Grande Île near Strasbourg Cathedral and Place Klébe. On December 11 last year, the Christmas spirit was marred by a terrorist, who shot and stabbed people, killing five and injuring several others.



8 STUTTGART, GERMANY 1692 AD

Set against the backdrop of the Old Palace in Stuttgart, there is the ‘Wintertraum’, a winter wonderland created to capture the nostalgic ambience of a White Christmas. Daily music concerts contribute to the atmosphere.

9 BARCELONA, SPAIN 1786 AD

The Cathedral Square in Barcelona hosts this market from December 13, Saint Lucy's Day, called Fira de Santa Lúcia. St. Lucy is the patroness of seamstresses and tailors. Unmarried girls attended the fair to buy clothes to attract admirers. When the nativity scenes became popular, it attracted children and became a Christmas market.

10 BOLOGNA, ITALY 1796 AD

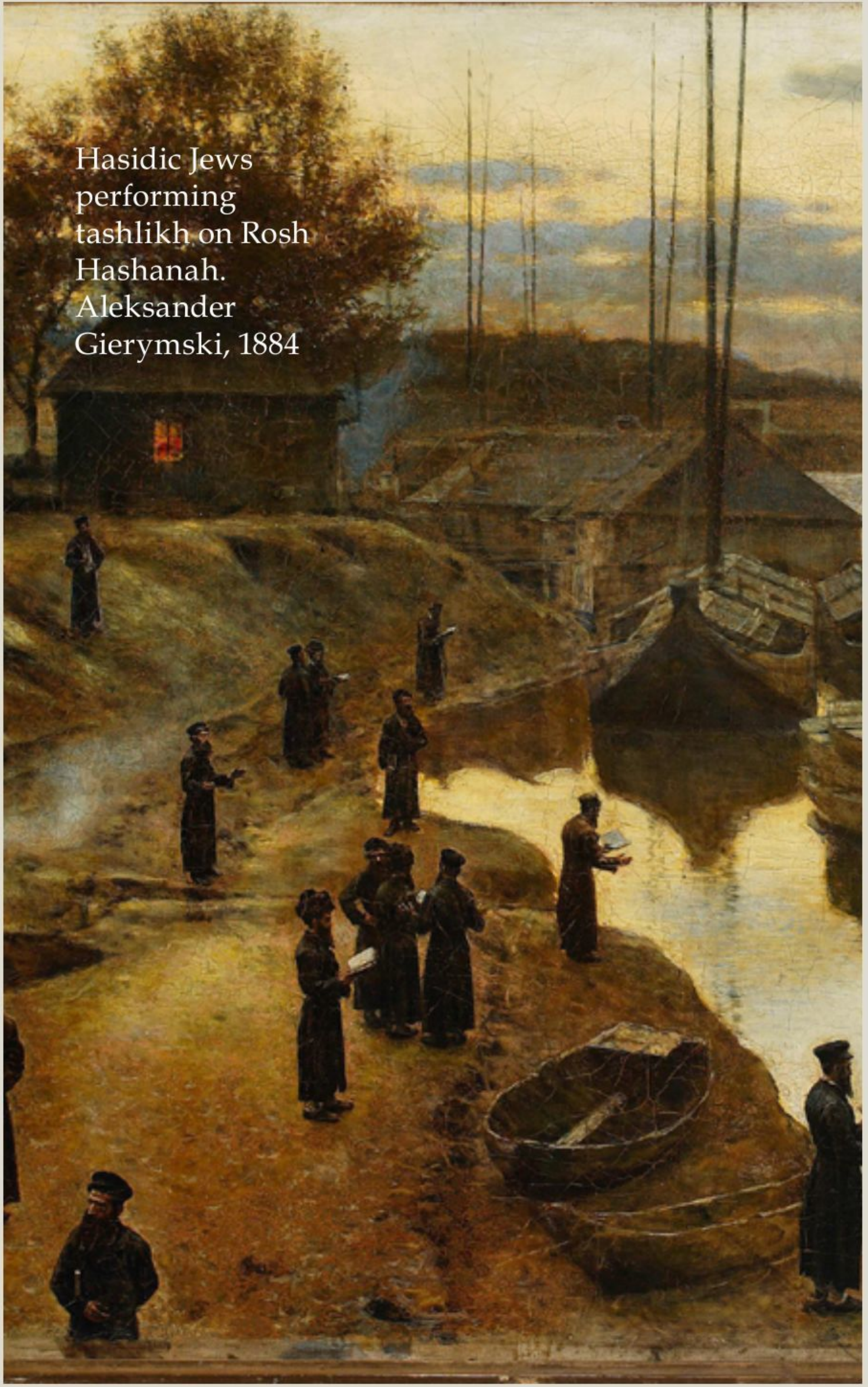
The market in honor of St Lucy the patroness of Bologna, takes place under the arcades of the monumental church of the Servants of Strada Maggiore. The nativity scene contains hand-made models of Meraviglia, a lady representing amazement in front of the nativity, and Dormiglione, a man who sleeps in oblivion.

FREEDOM'S EVE

In a tradition that can be traced to the early 18th century, Christians reflect on the mistakes of the past year and resolve to avoid repetition of their errors on Watch Night, also called Freedom’s Eve. Watchnight services are a late-night church service held on New Year’s Eve, when Christians prepare for the upcoming year by praying and resolving. Watch Night was given new significance among African Americans on December 31, 1862, when slaves and abolitionists gathered to wait for word that the Emancipation Proclamation had been issued.

THE BLAST OF TRUMPETS

Judaism has a similar idea with a practice that runs from the New Year, Rosh Hashanah, through the High Holidays and up until Yom Kippur (the Day of Atonement). Jewish people use this time to reflect on their mistakes in the past year and



Hasidic Jews performing tashlikh on Rosh Hashanah. Aleksander Gierymski, 1884

offer and seek out forgiveness for any wrongdoings.

“The lone blast of the shofar trumpet stretches out across the hills, illuminated by the first rays of the morning sun. The distinct sonorous call marks the important day of Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year, also called the “Day of Trumpets/Shouting” (*Yom Teru’ah*),” writes Jonathon Perrin, author of *Moses Restored*. “Millions of Jews around the world celebrate it each year by blasting the shofar trumpets, reading the Torah of Moses, and enjoying sweet delicacies like pomegranates, challah bread, and red wine.”

A PROMISE TO ONESELF

The general idea of a New Year’s resolution, regardless of one’s religious beliefs, is to reflect on the past and aim for self-improvement. The major difference is that people making resolutions in a non-religious context tend to make their promises to themselves, not a deity. The lack of a ‘higher power’ which could act cruelly if the resolution is not kept, may be part of the reason why New Year’s resolutions fall through for many people today. Most people believe they are not being held accountable to anyone but themselves if their resolution fails.

A 2007 study conducted at the University of Bristol showed 88 percent of the people who set New Year’s resolutions failed. The resolutions fell through even though 52 percent of the study’s 3,000 participants strongly believed they could complete their goals. Researchers provide some helpful tricks to improve the odds: men are 22 percent more likely to achieve their resolution if they engage in goal setting. Women will be 10 percent more likely to succeed in their New Year’s resolutions if they tell others of their goals and seek support from helpful people in their lives. ■

Goal Setting

Support



Terracotta statue of a woman. Old Babylonian (2000-1700 BC), with traces of red paint

Michel Wal/CC BY SA 3.0

HANUKKAH ORIGINS: THE 'MIRACLE OF THE OIL'



Known also as the Festival of Dedication, as well as the Festival of Lights, Hanukkah is a major Jewish holiday. It is celebrated annually for eight days and nights, usually between late November

and late December.

Traditionally, the lighting of a special menorah,

the eating of fried foods, and playing a symbolic game, all take place during Hanukkah to celebrate the 'Miracle of Oil.'

The story of Hanukkah begins in the second century BC, after the Torah was written. During this time, the land of Judaea was under the rule of the Seleucid Empire. Although the Seleucids first respected Jewish culture, a complete reversal occurred under the reign of Antiochus IV Epiphanes, who ruled from 175 to 164 BC. Antiochus, hoping to Hellenize the various peoples of the empire, outlawed the Jewish religion and made its practice punishable by death. He forced the Jews to worship the Greek gods and desecrated the Second Temple by erecting an altar to Zeus and offering sacrifices of pigs on it.

This angered the Jews, who revolted at Modiin, a village not far from Jerusalem. Here, Antiochus' soldiers forced the villagers to bow down to an idol and then had them eat pork; two practices that are prohibited in Judaism. Mattathias, a priest, refused to obey. When another villager offered to

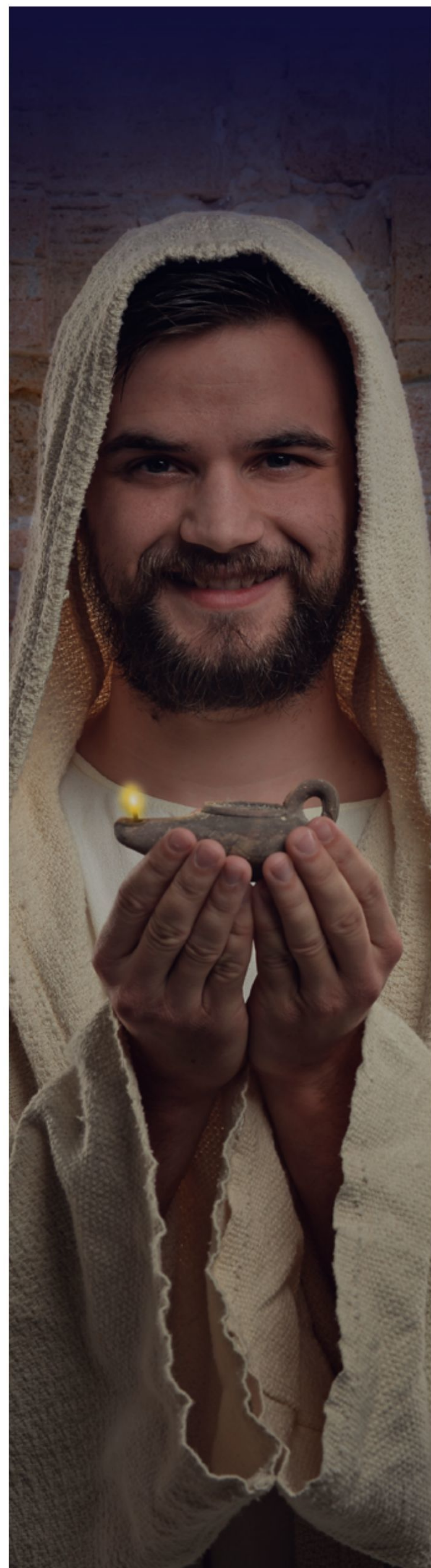
cooperate on his behalf, Mattathias became enraged and killed him. He then killed the Greek officer and the remaining soldiers were killed by the villagers.

Mattathias and his five sons fled to

the mountains, where they were joined by other Jews who wanted to fight

against the Seleucids. The rebels were aware that it would be suicide to engage the Seleucids in open battle so they resorted to guerrilla tactics. Upon Mattathias' death in 166 BC, his son Judas Maccabeus (nicknamed 'the Hammer'), became the new leader and the revolt came to be known as the Maccabean revolt. The rebel force succeeded in defeating the Seleucids and recaptured Jerusalem.

The victorious Jews proceeded to cleanse the defiled Temple. The celebration of Hanukkah is based on a miracle that is believed to have occurred during the Temple's re-dedication. In legend, when Judas and his supporters entered the Temple, they found that there was only enough untainted olive oil to keep a menorah burning for a day. To their surprise, however, the menorah kept burning for eight days. In another legend, eight iron spears were found by Judas, and Hanukkah candles were stuck on them to light the Temple. The Hebrew word 'Hanukkah' means 'dedication' and refers to the re-dedication of the Second Temple by the Maccabees.■



HISTORY

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and we are destined to
become part of it

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 **ANCIENT ORIGINS** MAGAZINE

PEPPARKAKOR

A TRADITIONAL
HOLIDAY FAVORITE
WITH A SPICY
SWEDISH TWIST

Academy of Taste



Alicia McDermott

Many of us think of baking around Christmas time and the aroma of cinnamon, cloves, vanilla, or orange reminds us of warm Christmas cookies on a cold winter day. One of my favorite recipes has always been the versatile gingerbread, which is why this month's choice of recipe, pepparkakor, is such a happy one for me.

TRADITIONS AND DECORATIONS

Making pepparkakor, gingerbread or gingersnap cookies, is a tradition many Swedish families still continue today as an integral part of celebrations like Advent and Lucia. They are eaten throughout the holiday season but pepparkakor are most often associated with St Lucia's Day, December 13. This

saint is said to have brought food and aid to Christians hiding in catacombs, lighting her way to them with a candle wreath on her head. Apart from a tasty treat, you can also find pepparkakor as Christmas tree decorations, which is no surprise when you look at the variety of symbols they are shaped into. *Julpepparkakor*, Christmas *pepparkakor*, come in a variety of fancy shapes, including the Christmas goat. However, the most popular way to cut these cookies is undoubtedly into hearts. Eating *pepparkakshjärtan*, gingerbread hearts, is thought to make people kinder, gentler, and happier. Another shape for the cookies worth mentioning is the form of the pig, which is believed to originate from the pagan *midvinterblotet*, mid-winter feast, and is related to fertility. These days, children are often



included in the preparation of pepparkakor. Like in many other parts of the world, they get the fun of decorating the cookies with icing. But unlike in some regions, those cookies aren't made to eat – they are decorations.

A house, pepparkakshus, is also made out of the same dough as the cookies but cut thicker to make assembling the holiday creations easier. Both children and professional architects compete in annual competitions to build the best pepparkakshus and the top examples are exhibited at the Architecture Museum in Stockholm.

Another interesting custom related to pepparkakor is wishing on a cookie. To try this out, you have to place a pepparkakor in the palm of your hand and use the index finger or thumb of your other hand to tap the cookie in the middle until it breaks. Traditionally, you only

get your wish if the pepparkakor breaks into three pieces.

ORIGINS OF PEPPARKAKOR

There are various beliefs about where and when pepparkakor originated. The most ancient tales say that the cookies are based on a Mesopotamian recipe from as far back as 1700 BC. Most people agree, however, that Germany is a more likely candidate for the inspiration of this cookie.

The first evidence for pepparkakor being eaten in Sweden is from the Middle Ages, in the 1300s, but it wasn't until the 1700s that recipes for the notable gingerbread cookies appeared in cookbooks. In the 1800s the Swedish people began to associate pepparkakor with their Christmas celebrations.

A PEPPER COOKIE...WITHOUT PEPPER?

Pepparkakor means pepper cookie. So it may surprise you to know that most modern recipes for these cookies don't include pepper. Ours does because as far back as 1444, there was pepper in the recipes – and in a relatively small quantity, it adds a nice kick. An alternative explanation for the name pepparkakor suggests that exotic spices used to be collectively called 'pepper' in Sweden in the past, so the name just means 'spice cookies.'



People used to believe that pepparkakor cured illness, banished depression, and increased sexual appetite. That's another explanation for why they are often shaped into hearts. The alleged curative powers of pepparkakor are probably related to one of the old ingredients used in the recipe – potash (now replaced by baking soda). This ingredient could have helped alleviate the stomach discomfort and indigestion that are so often linked with eating the rich foods we indulge in during the holidays.

There are options in choosing the spices to feature in pepparkakor today, but common staples include ginger, cinnamon, and cloves. You can also find variations with cardamom or bitter orange flavorings. If you can find it, Swedish sirap should be used in place of molasses in your recipe, to achieve a more traditional flavor to your pepparkakor. It is a kind of light liquid molasses syrup with a caramel flavor.

Pepparkakor are flavorful, crunchy, spicy cookies that add the perfect scent to the holiday season. In Sweden, they are often enjoyed with mulled wine, Glögg, but they're also tasty with tea, coffee, hot chocolate, or a glass of cold milk. ■

Recipe on page 98



BAKING WITH LYE AND WOOD ASH?

Baking soda (sodium bicarbonate) is a relatively recent invention and is the brainchild of two New York bakers, John Dwight and Austin Church. In 1846, they established the first factory in the United States to produce baking soda from sodium carbonate and carbon dioxide. So, what did bakers do before that? For a long time, they whipped eggs



into light fluffiness or more often relied on a long and temperamental home-made yeast (extracted from fermented fruits, vegetables, or grains) as their leavening agents. In 1791, the precursor of baking soda, pearl ash or potash (sodium carbonate), was invented by French chemist Nicolas Leblanc. It came from lye and wood ashes.



PEPPARKAKOR

INGREDIENTS

1/2 Cup water
1/2 Cup sirap, light syrup, dark syrup, or molasses
3/4 Cup brown sugar
1/2 Cup of room temperature butter
1 Tbsp ground cloves
1 Tbsp ground cinnamon
1 Tbsp ground ginger
1/2 Tsp ground black pepper (optional)
3 ½ Cups flour
Pinch of salt
1/2 Tbsp baking soda

METHOD

Put the sugar, syrup, and water in a pot and heat the ingredients until they start to bubble, then remove the pot from the heat and allow the mixture to cool while you perform the next step.

In a large bowl, add the butter and all the spices and then pour the warm (not hot) mixture from the pot over it. Continue to mix until the butter has completely melted.

Sift the flour, salt, and baking soda together and then add them to the wet ingredients, stirring until a dough forms.

With your hands, form the dough into a ball shape, cover it with clingfilm (or place it in a plastic bag) and leave the dough in the fridge for at least 24 hours.

When you are ready to bake, pre-heat the oven to 400°F and divide the dough into three or four pieces (it's easier to work with the dough in smaller quantities).

Roll the dough out thinly, approximately 1/4-inch thick. Use your favorite cookie cutters to cut out the cookies from the dough.

Bake the pepparkakor on a cookie sheet in the oven for between 5-10 minutes, depending on how big/thick they are, but watch them carefully. They are ready when they are a medium-brown color. Let the cookies cool to room temperature and enjoy! ■



NOTES

This recipe makes about 40 cookies if you roll them thinly to make gingersnaps. You can make the cookies with a gingerbread texture instead if you do not roll the dough as thin or if you bake them to only a golden-brown color.

Pepparkakor keeps well and the baked cookies can be stored for up to four weeks in an air-tight container. The dough will also keep well for a week in the fridge.

"Ät en pepparkaka, så blir du snäll!"

The traditional pepparkakor invitation: Eat a gingersnap, it will make you nice!

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